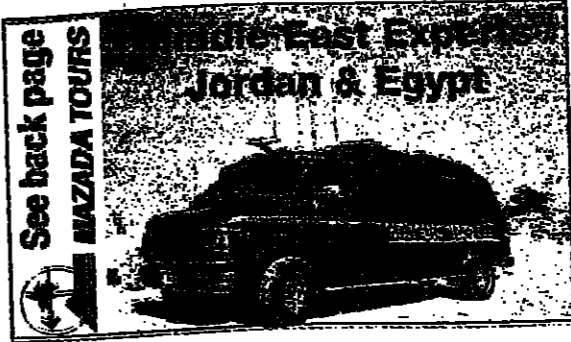


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Bar-On revelations and allegations

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God's army: IDF's Orthodox elite

The Magazine



30 years of the Israel Ballet

Time Out

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3 IDF soldiers killed in Lebanon

PM: Syria must restrain Hizbullah

ANALYSIS

No safe places in zone

By DAVID RUDGE and ARNEH O'SULLIVAN

The explosive device that tore through the ranks of an elite Nahal Brigade unit at midnight on Wednesday - killing three of the soldiers and badly wounding another - showed once again that "relative quiet" in south Lebanon is merely a euphemism for the time lapse between one fatal attack and another.

It also demonstrated, for the umpteenth time, that in the ongoing war in the security zone between the IDF and its South Lebanese Army ally on the one hand and Hizbullah, its Shi'ite rival Amal and Palestinian rejectionist groups on the other, there is no such thing as a relatively safe place.

The deadly attack offered additional proof, should any be needed, of the advantage that those who live in the field, or receive assistance based on the knowledge of local residents, have over the IDF troops trying to maintain control over what is still "alien territory."

Hizbullah and the IDF are waging a snowballing war of technology. Each side tries to outdo the other with its improvisations, but the nature of war in south Lebanon

Continued on Page 17



Soldiers lower the coffin of 19-year-old Sgt. Rotem Sharvit into his grave at the Mount Herzl Military Cemetery in Jerusalem yesterday evening. (Reuters)

By DAVID RUDGE

Three soldiers from an elite Nahal Brigade unit were killed and another was moderately wounded in a Hizbullah bomb attack inside the security zone late Wednesday night.

The dead are the commander of the unit, Lt. Yonatan Tzirkel, 21, of Kibbutz Shoval in the Negev; Sgt. Rotem Sharvit, 19, of Jerusalem; and Sgt. Niv Sadan, 19, of Kibbutz Meggido.

Tzirkel was buried in the cemetery of his kibbutz yesterday evening. An hour later, Sharvit was laid to rest at the Mt. Herzl Military Cemetery in Jerusalem. Hundreds of people attended the funerals.

Sadan is to be buried in the cemetery of his kibbutz at 11 this morning.

The wounded soldier was brought to Haifa's Rambam Hospital by helicopter. Rambam deputy director Dr. Zvi Ben-Ishai said the wounded soldier was suffering from shrapnel wounds in his eyes, chest and legs.

"He underwent surgery and was

from the field took a long time because of the difficult terrain, which made it difficult for the doctors in the rescue team to sufficiently stabilize the wounded so they could be removed by helicopter. Two of the soldiers were evacuated by helicopter to Rambam, but one of them died en route.

Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu called on Syria to stop

"The most simple and basic thing that needs to be done at this moment is for Syria to restrain Hizbullah, stop the war and carnage in Lebanon, and of course find with us the formula for returning to the negotiating table," he said.

In a veiled warning to Lebanon and ostensibly Syria, Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai condemned the bloody attack and said

directly and indirectly aiding the terrorist."

He praised the IDF forces in the security zone and said they were carrying out an important mission that assured the security of the state. For this, Mordechai said, they were worthy of the appreciation of the government and the entire nation.

The incident itself occurred in what is known as Wadi Alman, in



Sgt. Niv Sadan, left, Sgt. Rotem Sharvit and Lt. Yonatan Tzirkel. (IDF Spokesman)

Levine: Public debate bad for IDF morale, Page 2

later transferred to the intensive care unit. His condition is stable and there are good prospects that he will recover," Ben-Ishai said.

The evacuation of the casualties

Hizbullah and urged Syria to restart peace talks with Israel.

"We wish peace with Syria and want to resume negotiations with it. But what we are seeing is that Syria, in effect, is enabling an unceasing war against Israel and Israeli soldiers in Lebanon through Hizbullah," he said, in a statement released by his office.

it was likely to cause a "deterioration in the security situation in Lebanon."

Mordechai said such a situation would have a negative impact on the efforts to resume peace talks with Syria and Lebanon. In a press statement, Mordechai held the Lebanon government responsible as well as "elements which were

the Shomriya region of the zone's central sector, when the relatively small unit set out on ambush duty. The squad's mission was to try and locate, identify and destroy any terrorist infiltration squads in the area.

Continued on Page 17

Edison an antisemite?

By JUDY SEGAL

Postal Authority officials were red-faced yesterday upon learning that Thomas Edison, the famous inventor, who is to appear on an Israeli stamp to be issued soon, is believed by some to have been an antisemite.

The Postal Authority and the Israel Philatelic Service - informed of these claims by *The Jerusalem Post* - began to launch an investigation yesterday into the charge.

The NIS 3.50 stamp, depicting Edison, who invented the incandescent light bulb and the phonograph, along with Alexander Graham Bell, the inventor of the telephone, is supposed to be fea-

Continued on Page 17

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BeerSheva	4:52 p.m.	5:50 p.m.
Eilat	4:56 p.m.	5:58 p.m.



Generals blast public debate on S. Lebanon

By ARIEH O'SULLIVAN

OC Northern Command Maj.-Gen. Amiram Levine said the public debate over whether or not to keep IDF troops stationed in south Lebanon was having a detrimental effect on morale and was being manipulated by Hizbullah.

Lebanon without a written agreement because too many soldiers were being killed there. Beilin also said Israel's continued presence there was playing into the Syrians' hands.

and then people whom the public takes seriously are saying, 'Let's get up and leave,' then it certainly has an effect on the morale, readiness, determination and faith that what they are doing is really necessary," Peled said on Army Radio.

restrained policy against Hizbullah. However, the IDF has to walk a fine line. The Hizbullah traditionally attempts to escalate conflict before a resumption of peace talks with the Syrians.

PM to meet Mubarak, Arafat during Davos business conference

By DAVID MAKOVSKY

Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu heads to a major international business conference today in Davos, Switzerland, where officials said he hopes to reap political and economic dividends from the recent Hebron pullback accord.

peace alongside Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat. Netanyahu will hold private sessions with each on Sunday. The meeting between Mubarak and Netanyahu will be their first since last July.

African President Nelson Mandela. Other prominent figures attending are the new UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan and Newt Gingrich, Speaker of the US House of Representatives.

'However nice you were to him, he was even nicer to you'

By URIEL HEILMAN

When a roadside bomb that exploded early yesterday morning in the security zone took the life of Sgt. Rotem Sharvit, a 19-year-old soldier from Jerusalem, friends and relatives say the world lost a boisterous and clever individual who was always ready to help others.

ago, he kept seeing Rotem as the bridegroom. "He was like a son to me," Amir insisted. Once inducted into the IDF, Rotem spent five months in a pilots' training course before being transferred to a reconnaissance unit of Nahal, in which he had been serving for eight months.



David Sharvit attempts to console his wife Tali at the funeral of their son Rotem.

(Flash 90)

Weizman: No negotiations under current circumstances

By BAT SHEVA TSUR

Israel cannot sit down with the Syrians at the negotiating table as long as the situation in Lebanon continues as it is now, President Ezer Weizman said yesterday. "The Lebanon issue is a very grave and [has to be viewed] both from the political and the military points of view... It is, of course, connected from the political point of view with Syria," Weizman said yesterday.

Soldiers salute Tzirkel

"We of 'The Tzirkel Squad' don't know what to do, or how, because our father - which is what we called you behind your back - is no longer with us," members of Lt. Yonatan Tzirkel's unit said yesterday at his funeral on Kibbutz Shoval in the Negev.

"The army was important to Yonatan, and after he finished his officer's course, there was a smile of contentment on his face," his brother Boaz remembered.

Kibbutz mourns Sadan

By DAVID RUDGE

The death of Sgt. Niv Sadan, 19, of Kibbutz Meggido, cast a pall of mourning over the members of the community and those who knew the young soldier from his school days.

and his father, personnel manager of the Polygal plastics factory on the kibbutz, tried to come to terms with their loss quietly and alone. "Niv's death is a terrible blow to all of us on the kibbutz, especially his parents, his elder brother Lior, who is due to be released from the army in a month's time, and his younger sister, who is in high school," said Giora Sela, coordinator of the kibbutz.

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Those holding tickets numbered 368445, 852277, 702643, 435608, 149697, 521375, 003803, and 066716 all won NIS 5,000. Tickets ending in 37109, 02715, 72504, 02387, 44450, 42995, 43297, 40582, 93353, 06309, 32394, 65396, 77425, 17918, 82751, 47442, 90629, 95977, 05803 were good for NIS 1,000, while those holding tickets ending in 347, 976, 481 or 652 won NIS 100; in 55, 89, 22 or 03 NIS 30; in 44 or 74 NIS 20; and in 0 or 7, NIS 10.

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Lieberman hit with complaint over interview

The Amitai association filed a complaint with police yesterday against Avigdor Lieberman, the director-general of the Prime Minister's Office, for alleged incitement against the police and obstruction of an investigation.

The complaint, filed with National Investigations Chief Cmdr. Sando Mazar, relates to remarks Lieberman made in an interview on Channel 2 Wednesday night, in which he accused the police of racism and said they were being used to "settle political scores."

The association also filed a complaint on the matter with Acting Attorney-General Ediz Arbel.

Lieberman's remarks led to demands that he be suspended. Labor Knesset faction chairman MK Ra'anana Cohen appealed to Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu and Civil Service Commissioner Shmuel Hollander to suspend Lieberman immediately, until he retracted his remarks and the police complete its investigation of suspicious Lieberman doctored a report submitted to the cabinet on the Israel Broadcasting Authority.

Labor Party leader Shimon Peres said Lieberman's remarks were very serious.

"I have a very harsh opinion of this. One can't destroy national institutions for one's own comfort. The state doesn't belong to one party or the other. You can't keep on attacking judges, the police, officers or the press," Peres said.

Even Finance Minister Dan Meridor hinted that Lieberman had been out of line.

"The major task of the police, the prosecution, the attorney-general and the courts, is not just to enforce the law against ordinary citizens, but also against those in senior positions," Meridor said. "Even during this difficult time, I would advise everyone to act accordingly."

But Likud MK Uzi Landau said Lieberman's anger was not totally without basis.

"I would say don't judge a person in his anger, but I would also suggest that the police, not necessarily in this instance, examine carefully how they have been handling things during the past few years," Landau said.

"You have to understand that Lieberman was himself the focus of harsh public criticism without being able to defend himself, so you can understand that this man, in his hour of crisis, spoke the way he did." (Itan)

Pines: I heard about Bar-On story before ITV

By RAINE MARCUS and MICHAL YUDLEMAN

Labor MK Ofir Pines yesterday told the police that two people from the legal profession had told him of the conspiracy behind the appointment of Roni Bar-On long before Channel 1 broke the story last Wednesday.

Pines said he did not use this information in his petition to the High Court of Justice against Bar-On's appointment a few weeks ago, because at the time he found it difficult to believe.

But when he saw the report on television, he said, he decided to pass what he knew on to the police to enable them to cross-check their information and advance the investigation on the basis of data from different sources, independent of Channel 1's findings. He noted that the sources were reliable people whom he knew well, and that they had sought him out to give him the information.

Pines said it was important to inform the police of what he knew "following the attempt to undermine Channel 1's report. This information can substantiate the television's version."

He noted that he did not give his sources' names to the police, but said he would if asked. Meanwhile, he said he would try to persuade them to come forward themselves.

Lawyer Dan Avi-Yitzhak, Aryeh Deri's defense attorney, also gave evidence for around seven hours at the National Police Headquarters in Jerusalem yesterday. Rumors and speculations that Avi-Yitzhak leaked the story of the alleged



ITV reporter Ayala Hasson and lawyer Dan Avi-Yitzhak leave National Police Headquarters in Jerusalem after being questioned yesterday. (Flash 90)



during the sensitive and complicated probe.

Thus far eight people have been summoned to give evidence - the names of six have been published and Mazar refused to reveal the other two. Businessman David Appel, a close friend of Deri's who was accused by Hasson as being an intermediary between Deri and Bar-On, has said he will sue ITV. He is on the list of those who can be expected to be called for questioning, together with Jerusalem Mayor Ehud Olmert, Deri, Justice Minister Tzahi Hanegbi, Director-General of the Prime Minister's Office Avigdor Lieberman and others.

A senior police source said yesterday that if necessary "it will not damage our cause to ask a court to lift journalist/source immunity if this means we will get to the truth of the matter."

However, police are apparently progressing without asking for such a procedure. The source also said that at this stage there is no need to decide regarding the questioning of Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu.

Meanwhile, Itim reported that State Attorney Edna Arbel yesterday talked with Internal Security Minister Avigdor Kahalani seeking assurances that the investigation will proceed secretly and without any interference by Kahalani. She also spoke to Police Inspector-General Assaf Hefetz and the heads of the investigation. This followed reports that Kahalani was being updated on the investigation, and had updated MKs as well.

Bronfman demands Suissa apologize for remarks

By LIAT COLLINS

Yisrael Ba'alya faction chairman Roman Bronfman is demanding a public apology from Interior Minister Eli Suissa for his comments regarding the abuse of the Law of Return by immigrants from the CIS.

During an answer to a parliamentary question by Bronfman this week, Suissa told the MK: "You have no idea what damage the Law of Return is causing the State. I call it robbing the coffers."

Suissa said even girls and criminals are using dubious marriages or conversion to gain entry to Israel for the immigrant benefits and work. He said he had given orders to be stricter in handling entry permits.

Bronfman accused Suissa of casting a stigma over the whole immigration from the former Soviet Union.

"Israel exists thanks to the Law of Return and the immigration from the Diaspora," Bronfman said. "Immigration never harmed the country but only enriched it in all fields."

Bronfman said the minister could not place himself above the law in choosing what instructions to issue his staff.

"The ministry's policies border on an attack on human dignity and basic rights," he said. "The minister must either apologize or resign. His statements in the plenum were anti-Zionist and completely go against the essence of the State as a country of immigration and absorption."

In an Army Radio interview yesterday, Suissa said his statements had not been aimed specifically at Russian immigrants.

"The problem exists with immigrants from other countries too. The rate of Russian immigrants is so high that the problem occurs more frequently," he said.

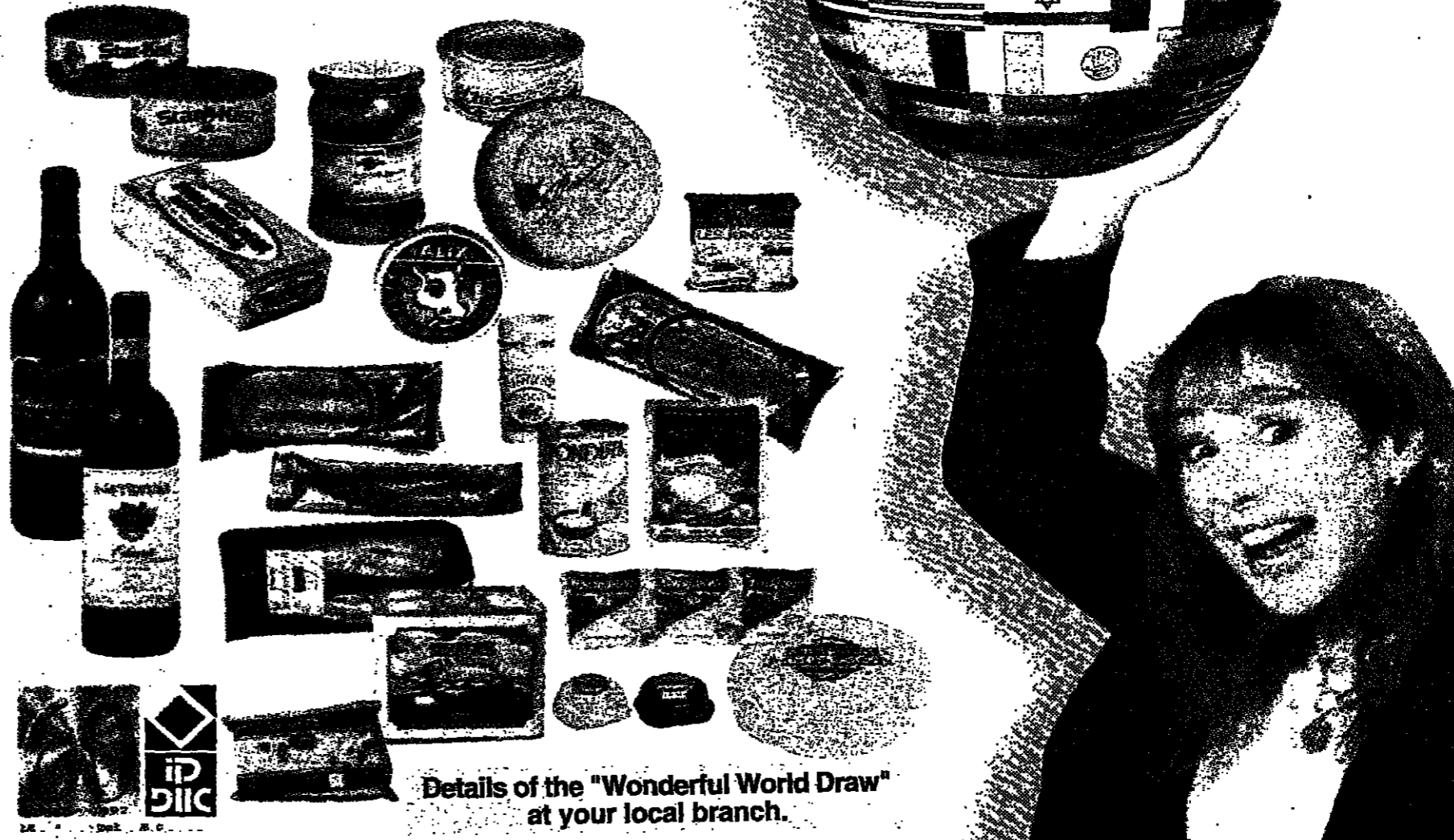
"Lately we've become a sanctuary for all sorts who can't find a corner anywhere else in the world... they bring forged documents, cheat us, take the [economic] absorption basket, receive an identity card, receive a passport, receive a mortgage and after that they run away and can't be found."

"In the last half of 1996 through our strict examinations we saved the country NIS 18 million through fictitious marriages which we caught."

He stressed he had no intention of changing the Law of Return "at the moment" and was only trying to prevent it being abused.

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TO: Douglas Goldstein, Director, Securities Division
 FROM: David Zwebner, President
 RE: 1996 Securities Division Performance

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The challenge of clean government

The accusations by Avigdor Lieberman, director-general of the Prime Minister's Office, that police investigations are motivated by "racism" and that the police are used to "settle political scores" were inappropriate and should be retracted, as Internal Security Minister Avigdor Kahalani and others have demanded.

government officials cannot speak for themselves; whatever they say reflects directly on the government in general and the prime minister in particular. The incident would be serious enough if it were an isolated one, and did not bring to mind other examples of a cavalier approach to preserving the public's trust in government.



Consensus, not compromise

I wasn't surprised at the criticism from both Likud and Labor regarding the consensus reached by MKs from both parties on a permanent agreement with the Palestinians. After all, for 30 years the future of the West Bank has been the central issue in our lives.

over the years, determined a part of our reality; but until recently each refused to reconcile itself with the reality created by the larger society. The Likud created a settlement map that, to us, seemed a grave mistake. Likewise, we designed the Oslo process, which the Likud saw as a serious error.

problem of recent years. The consensus we have achieved does, I believe, provide the most reasonable solution; our informal discussions with the Palestinians led us to understand that many hold it to be the most logical one. The problem of Jerusalem is the most difficult, because of its symbolic significance. The key to solving it is the way we define Al-Kuds and Jerusalem.

It is likely that we will have to continue discussing the future of East Jerusalem even after the permanent agreement, if there is no change in the status quo. A special arrangement is needed regarding the Christian and Moslem holy places. In my view, the best decision would be granting the Temple Mount extraterritorial status, making it a site where we would not exercise our sovereignty.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

WATER SUPPLIES

Sir, - Having just returned from a stay in Israel, I am aware of the current real anxiety in Israel concerning the security of water supplies for the country, but have also noted that precious treated drinking quality water is used for general purposes, such as personal hygiene and irrigation.

THE RIGHT TO VOTE

Sir, - The possibility of providing the expatriate Israeli with the right to vote in general elections marks a coming of age for the Israeli political system, for the right to vote is an integral part of any real democracy.

RECIPROCITY

Sir, - The New York Times of January 18 quotes Hebron Mayor Mustafa Natshe, when referring to the limit on the number of Palestinian policemen and paramilitary soldiers to be deployed, as saying: "Officially 400 is the number, but maybe it will be double or triple that to keep order. Who is going to count them?"

HEALING THE RIFTS

Sir, - Has anyone noticed that Mr. Netanyahu's promise to heal the country's deep rifts between factions and be prime minister of all of Israel has been kept? The statistics compiled by Liat Collins (January 17) show how the Hebron agreement passed handily while Oslo II, a little over a year ago, was passed by the Knesset with great difficulty.

ADOPTING A CHILD

Sir, - We would like to thank you for publishing the article of November 16 about the boy Daniel, who needs to be adopted. Due to this publication, several families expressed interest in his story and showed willingness to adopt him.

SELF-FLAGELLATION

Sir, - With the reopening of the Bus No. 300 affair, it seems that Israelis are engaging in a dangerous game of unveiling security service actions, a service vital to Israel's future.

ISRAEL BASHERS

Sir, - For the past two years, I have listened faithfully to BBC radio between about 12:30 a.m. and sign-off, and frequently heard Lyce Doucet's reports on Israel. Would that all foreign correspondents in Israel matched her for fairness and accuracy.

ISRAELI BASHERS

Unfortunately, we do not have a political echelon that is known for its honesty and integrity. We already have a large number of politicians and their cronies before the courts. In this environment, do we really want to provide another avenue for the corruption of our politicians? Are we prepared for the potential abuse that might arise?

ISRAELI BASHERS

Perhaps it is an idea whose time has come. But it may also be fraught with danger. The Knesset must examine this idea thoroughly, with an eye towards controls. It is better to assume such a law will be abused and prepared for such abuse, than to think Israeli politicians will show character, honesty and restraint.

Well-meaning, but lacking in wisdom

According to an intelligence report recently published in Washington, the growing division in our society is a prime factor encouraging Syria's leadership to push for war. The assessment in Damascus is that the schism that has opened up inside Israel will prevent us retaliating effectively in the event of a surprise attack.

Beilin and Eitan have good intentions. But there are no quick solutions to sticky problems

Dayan's wording. He didn't understand that one can accept a "territorial compromise" formula without infringing the principle of not proposing partition. Dayan didn't offer the Arabs partition; he told them that if they presented a concrete proposal, Israel would be willing to discuss it.

Beilin and Eitan have good intentions. But there are no quick solutions to sticky problems

In such an event, all positions previously defined as preconditions - such as guaranteeing the safety of the settlements, or leaving Jerusalem undivided - suddenly become subject to negotiation. This is the Beilin-Eitan document's main, and great, weakness. While incorporating several elements from past Knesset decisions and Israeli declarations, it turns what were heretofore immovables into mere jumping-off points.

There is no way a mighty tussle between us and the Palestinians on permanent borders can be avoided. But it can be postponed until 1999. After all, why hurry to bring the fight forward in time, to invited immediate confrontation - which is what the Beilin-Eitan endeavor does? The plan is said to be a guideline for the three future IDF redeployments. However, its publication will only accelerate the crisis.

POSTSCRIPTS

IN THIS country, street names can be a problem. Haredim objected to the naming of a thoroughfare in Jerusalem for the iconoclastic Jewish philosopher Spinoza: a street named for a Lehi fighter could be an embarrassing address for someone who fought in the Hagana.

believe it or not, is 3 Rehov Mochrei Hasigariot (Cigarette Sellers Street)! Judy Siegel THE FIRST JOKE may well have been Jewish. In Collected Wisdom Philip Jackson says the following: "As a lecturer on Jewish humor, I am pretty sure the oldest recorded joke is in the Hebrew Bible, which places it some 3,000 years ago, give or take a few. "It takes place in ... Exodus, shortly after the ancient Hebrews

have been freed from Egyptian slavery and have rushed into the desert toward the Promised Land. Within a few days they find themselves in front of the Red Sea with the Egyptian army in hot pursuit. "The Hebrews go up to Moses and cry, 'Ain kvarim b'mitzrayim...' which is Hebrew for 'Are there no graves in Egypt, that you took us out here to die?' "The Hebrews are using innuendo, sarcasm and wistful-through-the-graveyard humor. That, to me, is the oldest recorded joke in

Jewish literature, if not in human history. (Globe and Mail Word Watching) THIS IS the kind of bank robbery that makes outstanding citizens see red: same guy robbed a blood bank. The masked gunman slipped into a Red Cross blood bank in Cali, Colombia, and held up a cashier for more than \$4,000 collected from sales of blood to hospitals and revolved in laboratory test results.

A solid

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Rumor – it isn't journalism

Approached by a blackmailer with a copy of a love letter Lord Wellington had authored, the hero of Waterloo retorted: "Publish, and be damned!"

A look at the story that broke last week of a presumed "fix" between politicians and the previous attorney-general appointee shows that the Israel Broadcasting Authority appears to have distorted the message implied in Wellington's oft-quoted remark.

In this latest imbroglio involving the media and the political echelon, TV reporter Ayala Hasson and editor Rafik Halaby seem to feel that journalistic ethics allow them to report a story without offering any impartial evidence to back it up.

But to those involved, figures whose reputations and careers are under threat, they are saying, "We'll publish – and you'll be damned!"

There is a major difference between the IBA and the privately-owned press. Private journalists are governed by their own professional code of ethics; for them the law only comes into play in cases where libel is an issue.

Israel's Press Council instructs its members not to "reveal information conveyed to them on the condition that it remain confidential, and not [to] identify a confidential source unless the source agrees."

The IBA, however, is explicitly directed by law to "broadcast reliable information." The same law, the Law of the Israel Broadcasting Authority, paragraph 4, also dictates a modicum of balance in presenting views and opinions.

As a public broadcasting system, the IBA owes those who pay the special license fee the right to judge whether or not the news it presents is indeed reliable.

Why should the police, as the result of a criminal investigation, be the first to get a look at the factual basis underlying a highly damaging report such as the "Bar-On-for-Hebron deal"?

YISRAEL MEDAD

If the IBA wants to protect its sources, fine. But why should viewers be left in the dark without any objective evidence to explain why IBA executives are so confident about the veracity of their reporter's revelations?

After all, the public essentially owns the authority, and the authority's obligation is thus to the public.

In addition to serving the principles of truth and freedom of the press, the IBA is also obliged to act responsibly.

Interestingly, Hasson's scoop was not passed on for vetting by the IBA's own legal adviser.

Respect for the public demands real, independent corroboration

This is a highly unorthodox failure. A news item of this magnitude and potential ramifications should have been submitted to the legal test before being exposed to the light of day.

But of course, if a reporter or editor is thinking not about the public interest, or even about ethics, but only about a private agenda, such negligence becomes understandable.

Although IBA Director-General Moti Kirschbaum and TV director Yair Stern have taken pains to distance themselves from any "political" involvement, two stories from recent months point to a problem in the IBA, one that generates an unhealthy tension when the government is the subject of reportage.

INITIAL IBA coverage of Benjamin Netanyahu's US Social Security file "in the name of one John O'Sullivan" was not only severely critical of the prime minister's supposed behavior, but unbalanced and solely dependent on outside sources.

Evenually Steve Leibowitz – who works for the IBA's English News division and also reports for The Jerusalem Post – tracked down the real story on his own initiative. Netanyahu's financial irregularities were proved to be nonexistent.

A second incident was the question of who was telling the truth about the deliberations prior to the opening of the Hasmonian tunnel exit. Was it GSS Head Ami Ayalon, or the prime minister?

Again, without any real information except what is referred to in the trade as "chats in the corridor," the IBA waded into the anti-Netanyahu campaign with gusto.

When the prime minister's spokesman took the rare step of calling in political reporters and showing them the relevant sections of the cabinet minutes, it turned out that the IBA was again backing the wrong story.

Hasson has altered her initial report, which hinted broadly that Netanyahu himself was involved in the deal concocted between attorney-general candidate Roni Bar-On, MK Aryeh Deri and the director-general of his office, Avigdor Lieberman.

The problem, though, is that IBA consumers have been presented with no document, photograph or any other objective proof that what Hasson claims happened – and that her editor insists is "backed up by a thousand tons of cement" – is the truth.

If the story is so good, and undeniably – crucial for Israel as a democratic society, why not let the public into the know? And if there was no way to do that without compromising sources, why not wait a few days more in the hope of acquiring additional corroboration of such an explosive story?

Respect for the public has sunk very low, and that can't be anything but bad news.

The writer is director of Media Watch, a non-partisan advocacy group concerned with the ethical and professional standards of the media in Israel.



Return of the Wandering Jew

AMOTZ ASA-EL

AFTER seeing, in 1542 in a Hamburg church, a tall bearded, barefoot beggar in rags beating his breast, lowering his head and sighing deeply whenever he heard Christ's name, Schleswig's Bishop Paulus von Eitzen had no doubt: He had seen Ahasuerus, the Wandering Jew.

The esteemed clergyman was just one of numerous people who, over the centuries, claimed to have met the man who struck Jesus on his way to the crucifixion and was consequently condemned to roam the world without ever having a patch of it to call his own.

A plethora of prominent writers from Goethe to Gorky were fascinated by this character, who lent himself so easily to metaphor.

Some, like Christian Schubart's *Der ewige Jude*, described the despair that overcame the Wandering Jew after his failure to die in battle, fire and tempest; others, like William Wordsworth, returning from an arduous hike across France where he had left an illegitimate child, echoed their own travails through him.

For us Israelis, the Wandering Jew is neither echo, metaphor, nor myth; he is a palpable reality which, if absent voting becomes legal, may turn into thousands of Wandering Jews emerging on election day from their caves anywhere between New York and Melbourne in a fascinating attempt to attach the *ewige Jude* to his roots.

Some Zionists also have a Wandering Jew myth which, like Stalin's "rootless cosmopolitanism" propaganda against a predominantly Jewish intelligentsia, sees emigration as something in between tribal treason and religious blasphemy.

According to this attitude, those who seek their fortunes abroad are "a residue of wimps," as Yitzhak Rabin once described them. Surely, then, like Pilate, Cain and Prometheus, they deserve a timeless punishment.

After all, other emigrants merely abandon their fellow goyim; the yordim abandon us!

The thought that emigration is itself a form of voting, albeit with one's feet, apparently never occurred to the opponents of the proposed bill, most of whom conspicuously represent Israel's traditional, Labor-led elite. Yet emigration – at least since Abraham, the first yored, substituted a destitute Canaan for a prospering Egypt – can be traced primarily to one thing: livelihood.

The thousands who have left this country since its establishment are a grim reminder of our founding fathers' failure to create here the kind of economic opportunities offered elsewhere in the West.

Yet, rather than exploring the reasons for the abandonment of this country by its best and brightest, people like MK Yossi Sarid

Wandering-Jew prejudice. He believed he would ultimately induce Western Jews to abandon the Diaspora's golden calves and join his socialist experiment.

In reality, only a minuscule minority of Western Jews actually came here. They were usually idealists in search of a purer life, sometimes Meyer Lansky types who had more prosaic rea-

would highlight our possession of this omnipresent, unconventional weapon.

Perhaps the wanderers among us, whether a falafel grocer in Manhattan, a high-tech entrepreneur in Palo Alto, or a hitchhiker in Nepal carry a few of Ahasuerus's genes; but they are no longer the servile, drooling, hunchbacked, tear-sodden caricature he was. Rather, they are free people who have served in a Jewish army, and for often much more time than some of the self-righteous MKs who (conveniently ignoring haredim and Arabs) now say absentee voting should be the exclusive right of those who fight Israel's wars.

But whether or not the Diaspora impresses anyone as a powerhouse, who if not we Israelis, should realize that the Wandering Jew is no monster.

Antisemitic thought of him as a monument to their religious truth; in fact he merely reflected their own narrow-mindedness. Similarly, the same Israel that traditionally preferred to see in its emigrants' flight anyone's failure but its own, now assumes they would contaminate the political process.

The truth is that an emigrant's vote, a reflection of the tears, hopes and kin he left behind, would contribute an integral part to Israel's political mosaic.

Finally, redeeming the Wandering Jew from his rootlessness would achieve what, according to the Christian myth, was not supposed to happen until the Second Coming. And that alone would be fun to witness.

The writer is a member of The Jerusalem Post editorial staff.

A solid piece of advice

The best advice the new attorney-general, Elyakim Rubinstein, could give Prime Minister Netanyahu is to end the practice of making the attorney-general a regular participant in cabinet meetings.

Menachem Begin's institution of the custom was part of his exploitation of the symbols of statehood to strengthen the legitimacy of his government. With time, it has come to symbolize a major flaw in our constitutional system: confusing the legality of politics with the rule of law.

This confusion infects much of our public life. The reaction to the TV scoop on the abortive appointment of Roni Bar-On to the post of attorney-general is a case in point.

Legality is almost certainly not the major issue. In fact, it may not be an issue at all.

Making the attorney-general a regular participant in cabinet meetings was part of the process by which the confusion between the legality of politics and the rule of law was created.

Political issues were converted into questions of law. The attorney-general became the arbiter of ethical standards in government.

Thus, Begin asked attorney-general Yitzhak Zamir whether Ariel Sharon could remain a minister in the government after the Kahlan Commission, which investigated the massacre in the Beitrefugee camps, recommended he be ousted from his post as defense minister.

Zamir should have told Begin to read the commission's report and make his own decision. Instead he gave his affirmative ruling, approving Sharon's continued membership in the government, thus making a political issue into a legal one.

At the same time, the post of attorney-general was garbed in a judicial mantle. Accepting the attorney-general's advice became mandatory for the government and for the prime minister.

Aryeh Deri was ousted as a minister as a matter of law, because the attorney-general so advised prime minister Rabin in a formal legal opinion, which the High Court upheld.

ALLAN E. SHAPIRO

Both Rabin and Deri reacted in a similar fashion. Rabin wanted to get himself a different lawyer. However, the High Court held that he was stuck with the one he had. He wasn't even allowed to get another lawyer to present his point of view in court.

Deri was satisfied with his lawyer. He could be forgiven if he wanted to get himself a different attorney-general.

WHERE all this is leading is only too clear: The attorney-general is working himself out of a job. The long-term process is similar to what has already taken place with regard to judicial commissions of inquiry.

The new attorney-general should recommend his own absence from cabinet meetings

No government, except in very special circumstances, will decide to create such a commission. They not only are fact-finders, but they also make recommendations – on both personnel and policy.

What government, if it believes that it has a popular mandate to make decisions in these areas, would take the risk of setting up a judicial commission of inquiry?

Judicial commissions of inquiry have become too powerful for their own good. So has the attorney-general, if he is set up as an in-house arbiter of ethical standards within the government. It weakens his ability to perform as legal adviser to the government and its spokesman before the judicial bar.

No wonder successive prime ministers have sought legal assistance elsewhere.

Ya'acov Ne'eman and Ram Caspi drafted the pardon petition for the national unity government during the GSS Affair in 1986. Caspi was called upon once again to handle the legal tangles with the

Americans after Jonathan Pollard's arrest for espionage.

Elyakim Rubinstein, the newly designated attorney-general, should understand this subject thoroughly from his experience as cabinet secretary, under both Yitzhak Shamir and Yitzhak Rabin.

In fact, in 1991 he and Shamir agreed that Rubinstein's title would be changed to include the designation of counsel to the prime minister.

No change whatsoever appears to have been contemplated in Rubinstein's duties, which already included many functions legal in nature. The attorney-general, Yosef Harish, charged that the change in title of the cabinet secretary was a serious infringement of the prerogatives of his office, and the plan was dropped.

If the attorney-general really becomes an outsider from the point of view of the government, chosen, perhaps, like a judge, as MK Shaul Yahalom, chairman of the Knesset law committee has proposed, it is almost inevitable that there will be a counsel to the prime minister, in fact if not in name. This would fit the pattern set by the direct election of the prime minister.

Like an American president, he would have his own legal counsel, apart from the attorney-general. When Franklin Roosevelt instituted the practice, with the appointment of Samuel Rosenman as counsel to the president, the title of the office was changed to special counsel to the president, to assuage the apprehensions and injured pride of the attorney-general.

Netanyahu is no different from his immediate predecessors if he wants his own lawyer. Rubinstein can fill the bill and also preserve the rule of law.

To do so, he should project a more modest conception of his office than has become fashionable in this age of legal imperialism. Absenting himself from cabinet meetings would be a salutary beginning.

The writer is a legal and political commentator.

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Yeltsin returns to Kremlin office

From Post news agencies

MOSCOW — President Boris Yeltsin was shown on television working in the Kremlin yesterday for the second time this week — demonstrating he is retaining command of the ship of state while recovering from pneumonia.

A brief, five-second film broadcast by Russia's independent NTV network showed Yeltsin smiling broadly as he greeted the country's Constitutional Court chairman.

Yeltsin looked slightly hunched but appeared to be moving easily as he walked to his chair.

"He's gaining. It's obvious from his mood and activity," said presidential press secretary Sergei Yastrzhembsky.

In the late morning Yeltsin's limousine with its presidential flag swept at high speed through Moscow, led by a four-wheel drive car packed with bodyguards. The flashing lights and siren aroused little interest among passers by.

The television footage showed Yeltsin smiling broadly as he received the court leader, Vladimir Tumanov, in his office for 30 minutes.

He moved slowly to his table. The film was then cut to show him sitting with Tumanov and talking in a relaxed manner.

At one point, the president, speaking in his characteristic low, growling voice, appeared to be expressing a desire to return to a more active life.

"Don't hurry," Tumanov could be heard saying.

In a brief interview following the shots of Yeltsin, Tumanov added: "He looks better in real life than he does on television... though it is clear that the illness is still having its effect on him." Kremlin spokesman Sergei Yastrzhembsky said Yeltsin might hold several more meetings today, including one with his chief of staff Anatoly Chubais.

It was Yeltsin's third visit to the Kremlin since he was released from hospital on January 20 after treatment for pneumonia. He has been spending most of his time in the secluded Gorky-9 official residence outside Moscow.

Yeltsin, who turns 66 tomorrow and is due to hold talks outside Moscow with French President Jacques Chirac on Sunday, has visited the Kremlin only rarely since he won a second term in office on July 3.

He was absent with heart problems for most of the second half of last year — he underwent open heart surgery on November 5 — and he fell ill again with pneumonia on January 6.

The president's long absence has fuelled speculation that he is too ill to rule Russia, and a brief appearance on television on Tuesday did little to calm the rumor mill.

Yeltsin looked alert in the television footage, but he had clearly lost a lot of weight since he fell ill. The film was heavily edited, making it hard to judge his state of health.

Yeltsin's opponents have been lobbying for him to step down.

Earlier this month Deputies in the State Duma, the lower house of parliament, discussed a motion to force Yeltsin out of office for health reasons, although Duma legal experts say it has little chance of success under the constitution.

Aides say Yeltsin has mainly been working on papers since he left hospital. A major topic is the annual state of the nation address to both houses of parliament, expected late next month.

He has also discussed Monday's presidential election in rebel Chechnya, in which the relatively moderate Aslan Mashadov has emerged as the clear winner.

Moscow has ruled out his demands for secession and faces tough negotiations on the issue.



Gandhi remembered

A Hindu priest (right) chants hymns as Tushar Gandhi (second on right), great grandson of Mahatma Gandhi, sits with his wife and children on the banks of the Ganges River besides an urn carrying the ashes of modern India's founding father in Allahabad yesterday. The ashes were immersed in the river by Tushar Gandhi on the 49th anniversary of Gandhi's assassination, after he won control of the urn from a bank where it had lain unclaimed in a vault since 1950.

Tearful Algerian president leads labor leader's funeral

PARIS (Reuters) — Thousands of Algerians, including a tearful President Liamine Zeroual and the army chief Mohamed Lamari, attended the funeral yesterday of slain union leader Abdelhak Benhamouda in Algiers's El-Alia martyrs' cemetery.

Witnesses said Zeroual, shocked by the death of a man known as one of his strongest political supporters, could not hold back tears, which ran down his cheeks.

Benhamouda's wife, three daughters and two sons, and mother wept in the cemetery.

Security forces were heavily deployed around the union headquarters where Benhamouda was gunned down on Tuesday and where his body lay in state, and at El-Alia cemetery, reserved for Algeria's martyrs.

The government blamed Moslem fundamentalists for his death.

"Hundreds of Ninjas (anti-terrorist troops) were on guard, with dogs trained to detect bombs," one witness said, a reminder of bombings in Algiers and elsewhere in

the past two weeks.

Traffic stopped across Algeria at 1 p.m. in response to a call by the union for one minute of silence in his memory. The radio said that in his home town Constantine, workers rallied at the local cemetery where the "prayer for the absent" was said.

Despite the government blaming Moslem rebels, independent newspapers and many ordinary Algerians asked whether they, or political rivals, were behind the killing.

Benhamouda's last words — "Kamel, my brother, they have betrayed us" — gasped out before he died and reported by an Algerian newspaper, added to the mystery.

Those words, the ambush in central Algiers and the escape in the heavily-policed city of the gunmen raised a clamor of questions over his killing and its motives.

Algeria's independent newspapers all asked: "Who killed Benhamouda?" a powerful figure only in his 40s who was preparing to start his own political party.

Blast blows hole in California courthouse

VALLEJO, California (AP) — An explosion felt blocks away blasted a hole in the courthouse here yesterday and knocked out scores of windows, the third recent incident involving explosives in this San Francisco area city.

The blast around 3:30 a.m. shattered windows in the Solano County Courthouse as well as at least four other buildings in the area. There were believed to be no injuries.

Investigators found a wire trailing from the courthouse and around a nearby corner, and it's "reasonable to assume" it was involved, said David Robinson, spokesman for the county sheriff's department.

Authorities said the building would reopen today. FBI agents were today to help in the investigation, said Clifford Holly of the bureau's Sacramento office.

The hole in the courthouse wall was about the size of a manhole, KGO radio said. A resident told the station the blast "was just like dynamite going off in the back yard." Authorities have said they believe there is a connection between the earlier incidents.

A bomb made of 30 sticks of dynamite and blasting caps was found in a rucksack leaning against the wall of the John F. Kennedy library on Saturday. It had not been wired to go off.

A second device exploded about 12 hours later in front of a set of Wells Fargo ATM machines a few km away.

No one was injured and no money was taken.

Investigators speculate the automatic tellers were the intended target of the first bomb, but the attempt was aborted for some reason and the bomb abandoned.

Anti-Christian rampage in Indonesia

JAKARTA (AP) — Thousands of Moslems ransacked churches, banks, shops and cars yesterday after a Chinese Christian trader reportedly insulted Islam by complaining about loud evening prayers, police and witnesses said.

Police reported no casualties and said the violence was brought under control after three truckloads of troops armed with automatic weapons moved into the town of Rengasdengklok, 50 km east of Jakarta.

Police Sgt. Jumhalim said the unidentified Chinese trader sought police protection after the mob set fire to his home and shop. No one has been arrested, said Jumhalim, who like many Indonesians uses only one name.

Witnesses said thousands of angry Moslems armed with stones and sticks came out of mosques and homes after morning prayers and went on a rampage.

Four churches, dozens of shops, two banks and a Chinese temple were ransacked. The mob also stoned and wrecked 18 cars, setting fire to some of them.

Smoke billowed from one church that was set ablaze, said Joko, a nearby resident. The troops set up road blocks on main streets, warning citizens to stay away from the stricken area, he said.

Joko said the riot was apparently set off by a rumor that a Chinese shopkeeper, a Christian, had complained about the loud prayers at a mosque in the evenings. It was not clear if the trader actually made the remarks.

The ethnic-religious riot is the latest in a series of clashes in the past few months between the two communities.

Ethnic Chinese, mostly Christians traders, are far wealthier than the vast majority of Moslems in Indonesia. About 90 percent of

Indonesia's 200 million people are Islam.

A curfew has been imposed in the area to prevent further outbreaks of violence, Indonesian television reported.

About 40 masked men ransacked a Roman Catholic group's office in a remote Indonesian province on Borneo Island and set ablaze a truck and two motorcycles.

Earlier this month, 5,000 indigenous people called Dayaks, who are mostly Christians, rampaged in the same province, attacking property belonging to Moslem settlers from other parts of Indonesia.

In December, four people were killed and more than 100 buildings burned in Moslem-Christian riots in the West Java town of Tasikmalaya. Five people were killed in October when thousands of Moslems in the East Java town of Situbondo attacked dozens of churches.

Zaire army on defensive on many fronts

KINSHASA (Reuters) — Zaire's counter-offensive against rebels has run into difficulty with the mercenary-backed government army on the defensive on many fronts, government and military sources said yesterday.

A senior defence ministry official in the capital Kinshasa said rebels backed by Rwandan troops were heading towards the mining province of Shaba and were within 70 km of the town of Kalemie.

Ugandan troops backing the rebels had reached the Upper Zaire town of Bunia, close to the Ugandan border, which the Zaire army earlier claimed to have partly retaken, the sources said.

"We are having to fight on several fronts," a defence ministry official in Kinshasa said yesterday, asking not to be identified.

He said the Ugandans had crossed into Zaire in their thou-

sands and were now also threatening the town of Watsa, about 200 km inside Zaire. Both Uganda and Rwanda deny that their troops are involved in fighting inside Zaire.

Military sources said Zairean soldiers and foreign mercenaries were based in Watsa, at one point under the command of the Belgian mercenary leader Christian Tavemler.

The accounts from Kinshasa were in line with reports from Rwanda that rebels in eastern Zaire were pushing south and west, opening new fronts to frustrate the army's counter-offensive.

They said rebel targets were Kalemie, their leader Laurent Kabila's home town on Lake Tanganyika, and Lubutu, a key town on the road to the Zairean army's main base at Kisangani.

"The strategy is clearly to stretch out the front as far as pos-

sible," a Western diplomat in neighboring Rwanda said.

After losing a long thin strip of eastern territory to Kabila's rebels late last year, Zaire's ailing President Mobutu Sese Seko

launched his army's counter-attack this month.

Western sources in Kinshasa said radio contact with the region said Watsa had already fallen to rebels with Ugandan backing.

Public Commission for the Review of Comprehensive Legislation for the Handicapped

APPEAL TO THE PUBLIC

The Minister of Justice and the Minister of Labor and Social Affairs have recently appointed a public commission to review comprehensive policy for persons with disabilities (handicapped).

The public is invited to offer suggestions.

Anyone with suggestions

should write to Dr. Dahlia Sommer, Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, 10 Rehov Yad Harutzim, Jerusalem 91012.

US report blasts rights in China, other countries

WASHINGTON (AP) — China's security apparatus has succeeded in silencing all public dissent against the Communist Party and government, the State Department said yesterday in a global human rights report that also found deplorable rights conditions in Nigeria, Cuba and Burma.

"The Chinese government in 1996 continued to commit widespread and well-documented human rights abuses, in violation of internationally accepted norms, stemming from the authorities' intolerance of dissent, fear of unrest and the continuing absence of laws protecting basic freedoms," the report said.

We mourn the passing of a dear friend in New York

PHILIP GORODETZER ז"ל

Our hearts are with his beloved Paula, Moshe, Harvey, Laya and their families Bobbin Kleinberg and Oded Pollig

To Steve Brenner

We offer our deepest condolences on the death of your

Father ז"ל

The Management and Workers of Israel Oceanographic and Limnological Research

On the sh'yoshim of the death of our beloved

HENRI POHORYLES ז"ל

We will gather for the unveiling at his graveside at the Shikun Vatikim Cemetery, Netanya, on Tuesday, February 4, 1997 (27 Shvat 5757), at 1:30 p.m.

Following the unveiling, a memorial ceremony will be held at 3 p.m. at the Park Hotel, 7 Rehov David Hamelekh, Netanya. Gilberte and the Family

Billions in pensions paid to Nazis

By MARILYN HENRY and news agencies

Germany is paying billions of Deutsche marks in disability pensions to thousands of Nazi "war criminals," according to a German television report aired yesterday.

More than 1.1 million people are receiving a total of DM 13 billion under the German "Social Compensation And Assistance To War Victims" law, according to the Panorama program. To qualify, one must have been injured as a result of war service, without regard to the nature of that war service.

Ignatz Bubis, head of Germany's Jewish community, told Panorama that disability payments to suspected Nazi war criminals makes "a mockery of the real victims." The federal Labor Ministry said Nazi war criminals are not supposed to receive disability pay but conceded there are loopholes.

"This is an unfortunate fact," said a ministry official, who insisted his name not be used.

Gerhard Schreiber, a German military historian, estimated that 50,000 "war criminals" are receiving the monthly pensions, the Panorama report said. Last month, The Times of London reported that thousands of SS veterans - includ-

ing nearly 4,000 in the US and Britain - receive disability pensions from Germany.

Panorama said 179 Latvians who served in Hitler's army, including some who were in the notorious Waffen SS, are receiving German disability pay while 88 Holocaust survivors in the Baltic nation receive nothing from Germany.

These reports come amid new pressure to provide some kind of compensation for an estimated 13,000 Holocaust survivors in Eastern Europe who have been excluded from previous reparations programs. The SS pensions are higher than the compensation proposed for survivors from the East Bloc.

A spokesman for the German Ministry of Labor confirmed that funds are paid to war criminals but said that nothing could be changed for "constitutional reasons."

Panorama said. One recipient is the former SS Hauptsturmführer Wilhelm Mohrke, a confidant of Adolf Hitler who was commandant of the "Führerbunker" in Berlin during Hitler's last days. According to the US Justice Department, "There is very substantial evidence pointing to Wilhelm

Mohrke's personal involvement in the perpetration of Nazi war crimes" - for his role in the massacre of 72 American POWs in 1944 during the Battle of the Bulge, Panorama said.

About 1.1 million German war veterans or their families are receiving disability payments under the 1950 Federal Benefits Law, the weekly newspaper Die Zeit reported.

These include not just normal soldiers but also about 50,000 suspected "war criminals," (former) members of criminal organizations like the Waffen SS or their wives," Die Zeit said.

Die Zeit documented a number of cases.

It told of Wolfgang Lehnigk-Emden, who was convicted in absentia in October 1994 by an Italian court and sentenced to life in prison for ordering the 1943 massacre of 22 Italians - mostly women and children.

The former lieutenant in Hitler's army is receiving a monthly disability payment of 708 marks (\$431), Die Zeit said.

The Labor Ministry confirmed Lehnigk-Emden receives a disability pension, but only because he was never convicted by a German court.

אנו מניחים

Syriaspeak: Icy winds blow from the North

Experts are worried about the clear message sent by Syria in an extraordinary interview given by its US envoy, Douglas Davis reports from London

Walid Mualem, Syria's ambassador to Washington and leader of its negotiating team with Israel, offers little hope that Syria will soften its position to facilitate a resumption of peace talks and warns of unstated "options" if the talks fail.

He also delicately lifts the veil which shrouds perceptions in that most tightly controlled and opaque state in the region.

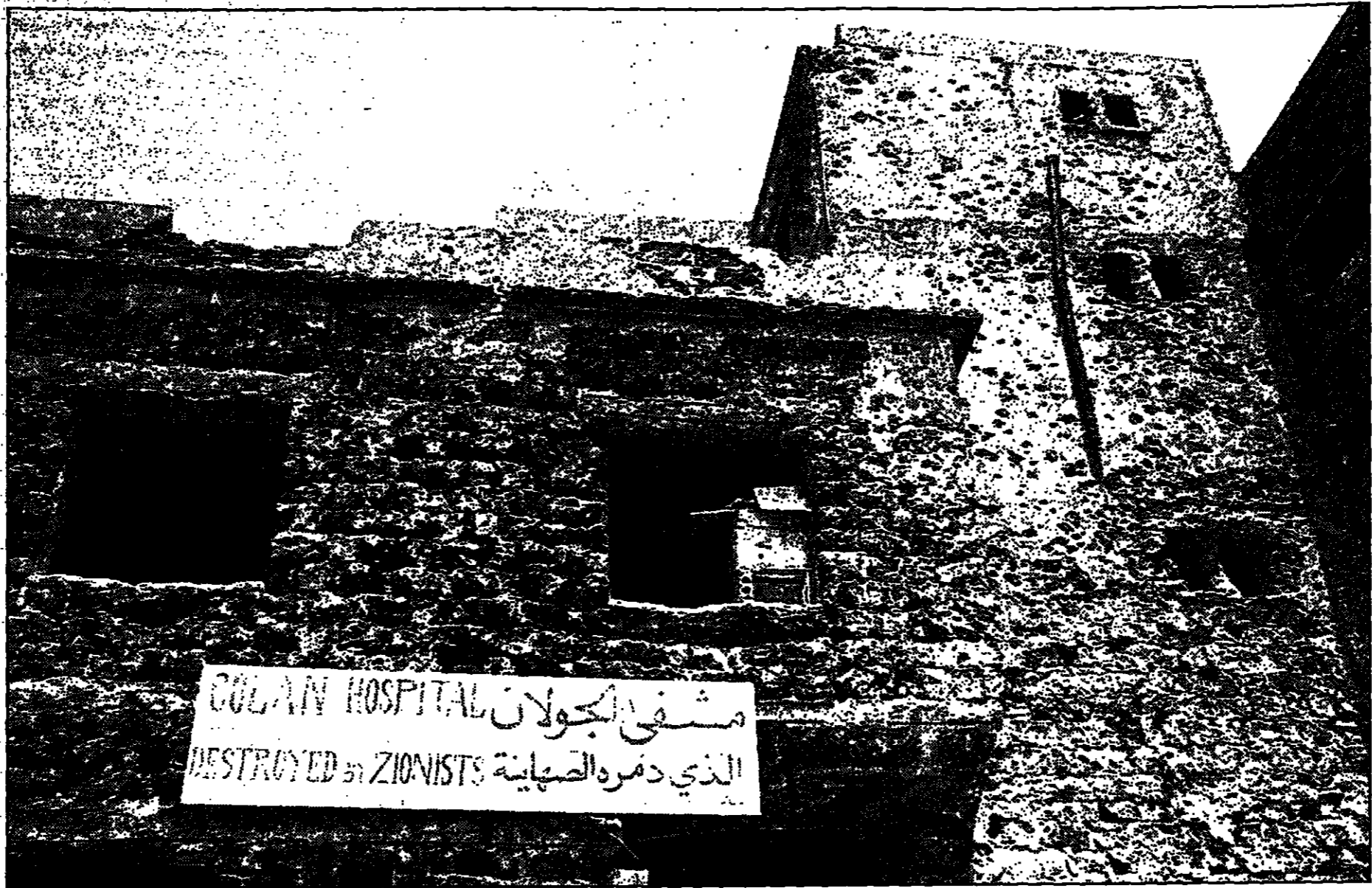
Mualem's reflections are the result of a series of three interviews conducted over a period of time ending in late November with Linda Butler, managing editor of the *Journal of Palestine Studies*, a quarterly published in Washington by the Beirut-based Institute for Palestine Studies. The interview will appear in the journal's winter edition.

Those who have access to advance copies regard it with alarm because of its distortion, intransigence, inflexibility and, not least, its implied threat.

Nor, say veteran observers of the Damascus regime, is Mualem speaking for himself; rather, he is faithfully executing the wishes and expressing the disingenuous, but carefully calculated sentiments of Syrian President Hafez Assad.

The interview, they say, strengthens the view of those who argue that Syria is not serious about making peace with Israel. In the absence of its former Soviet ally, its participation in the peace process has been designed principally to place Washington and to establish its place in a new, unpopular world.

They also fear that the interview, exceptional in its depth, scope and candor for a senior Syrian official, could be the opening diplomatic salvo from Damascus in an offensive that is intended to lead to military conflict.



Syria's ambassador Mualem: The Golan is our territory. It is a sacred cause for the Syrian people, and we will continue to struggle until we recover this territory (Per Haastorp)

In the interview, Mualem maintained: "The late prime minister Yitzhak Rabin had undertaken to withdraw from the Golan to the lines of June 4, 1967, and that this had been reaffirmed by his successor, Shimon Peres."

Rabin and Peres had agreed to a formula that offered equal and mutual security arrangements.

Syria had rejected Israel's "exaggerated" proposals for normalization and for security

'When Rabin committed himself to withdrawal, he was representing Israel, not himself personally.'

—Walid Mualem

arrangements (which, he admitted, had included the offer to Syria of

an early-warning ground station in Safed).

Unless Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu accepts the Rabin/Peres commitment to withdraw to the June 4, 1967, lines and their commitment to equal, mutual security arrangements, "all options are open."

He also said Damascus had refrained from assisting Peres's election campaign because Syria did not wish to interfere in Israel's domestic affairs.

And he said Syria had refused to "do their work for them" by helping the Israeli government prepare the Israeli public opinion for peace.

'We won't permit a ground station in our territory manned by the Israelis.'

—Walid Mualem

He described Rabin as "reluctant, suspicious, very cautious" but noted that Peres had sent a

message to the negotiators saying he wanted to "fly high and fast."

Mualem blamed the current impasse on Peres, first for calling early elections and then for suspending negotiations over what the Syrian envoy described as "so-called terrorism" following the February/March suicide bombings.

He insisted that Syria regarded Rabin's commitment to a total withdrawal from the Golan as binding on the current government and as the non-negotiable starting point for future talks between Israel and Syria.

US: Syria has not closed the door

HILLEL KUTTLER WASHINGTON

A senior US official explained the apparent contradiction between Syrian Ambassador to the US Walid Mualem's statements on the withdrawal agreement and the Christopher letter as the Syrians' "tendency to ascribe formal status to things less than formal," which he said "has to be noted."

While the US has not made clear what was contained in the Christopher letter, the official said: "Suffice it to say, our position has been made clear to all the parties concerned about what did or didn't happen [in the talks]. I don't think there's any additional clarification that needs to be given to the Syrians."

The official also said the US does not believe the Syrians have closed the door on resuming talks. The official added that the US will have a better idea about how to bridge the gap when Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu visits with US President Clinton early next month.

Asked how to square Mualem's statements with Christopher's letter, the official said: "It means the Syrians want to talk. They want to set out a position publicly that puts them in the best possible light. This is not designed to make it impossible to start the talks."

"A bridging formula is possible," he added. "Much depends on what we hear from the prime minister."

Continued on Page 18

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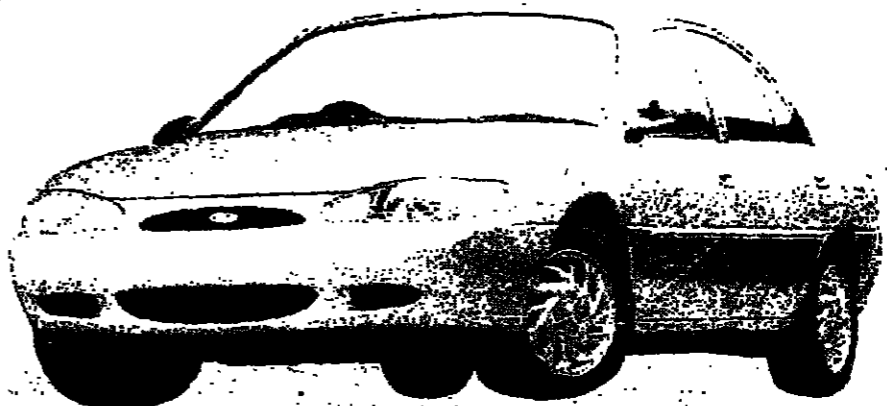
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By URIEL HEILMAN

From left to right in the drawing:
Shaul Yahalom
 National Religious Party MK, chairman of the Knesset Law Committee, scoffed at his party's cabinet ministers' attempt to deny having advance knowledge of a Bar-On for Hebron deal. He later retracted a statement (on orders from Hammer) he had made to the press that the NRP's ministers

abstained from the vote for Bar-On's appointment because they knew of the alleged conspiracy.
Elyakim Rubinstein
 A Jerusalem court district judge and former cabinet secretary and peace negotiator who was named the new attorney general on Sunday, winning easy cabinet approval.

Edna Arbel
 State attorney and acting attorney-general, ordered police to investigate the allegations against Bar-On and Deri.

Ayala Hasson
 Channel 1 TV reporter. Alleged that Deri promised Shas's support for the Hebron agreement in exchange for the appointment of Bar-On as attorney-general in an arrangement with Lieberman. According to Hasson, Bar-On was then to grant Deri a plea bargain for the long-standing charges against him.

Hasson has refused to reveal her source of information about the conspiracy charges, but has declared that her allegations do not implicate the prime minister.

Ovadia Yosef
 Shas spiritual leader, says that

because of his halachic ruling Shas MKs voted for the Hebron deal. He also rejected Deri's request to quit politics.

Mordechai Kirschenbaum
 Israeli Broadcasting Authority Director-General, has agreed that

he will have to resign if Channel 1 bungled the story.

David Appel
 Prominent Likud activist and millionaire businessman. He is alleged to have suggested Bar-On's appointment to Deri.

Avigdor Lieberman
 Prime Minister's Office director-general. Has been accused by Hasson of consorting with Deri and Bar-On in a deal in which the former would be granted a plea bargain in exchange for the latter's appointment as attorney general.

Major players in the

Bar-O

Showdown in the not-so-OK Knesset corral

Did Channel 1 recklessly set off noisy firecrackers on Politiciansville's Main Street or did someone really hand it potentially lethal dynamite sticks with which to drive the outlaws out of town?

That remains to be seen, but what is sure is that the explosion did not have the same effect on all those within its range. Shaken and bruised, Shas considers itself the victim of a deliberate, dastardly act. The Likud was threatened, surveyed the damage, and, judging it was minimal, is now eager for a fight to settle accounts. Labor took cover and tried hard not to get involved in a shootout which could end what it hopes might still be a beautiful friendship with the intended targets. The National Religious Party is scared lest traces of the powder be discovered on its hands, while Meretz gleefully lost no time in rushing to the sheriff, loudly clamoring that he send out the posse.

Shas really took the brunt of the assault. Because its leader Aryeh Deri has already had his run-ins with the law, he and his sidekicks fear that no one will believe them, that he has become all too easy to frame Deri. Once Channel 1 lowered its sights last weekend and cautiously removed Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu from its hit list, Deri loomed largest on its wanted poster. That may be why many in Shas say that he is not faking this time when he talks about quitting politics. Deri has in the past announced his impending departure but never rode off into the sunset, a fact which invited a cynical reception for his latest announcement. But Labor and Welfare Minister Eli Yishai attests that "Deri really took this to heart. Yes, he has a heart and

Shock waves from the Bar-On/Hebron scandal have been felt throughout the Knesset. But not all the parties will suffer equally, Sarah Honig reports

he has feelings and he has been under relentless fire for seven whole years. He just feels that he can't take any more, that no matter what happens in this country, his name is dragged into it as if he were evil personified. Even his enemies must stop and ponder whether this campaign of demonization has not reached grotesque proportions.

Be that as it may, Deri will not quit because his mentor Rabbi Ovadia Yosef forbids it. Yosef knows full well that without the dynamic, charismatic Deri, his movement will fade away. Deri really is indispensable to Shas

claim to possess. I know they have nothing because I know no one instructed our ministers to support the Bar-On appointment in the cabinet and hence there was no possibility of a deal on the Hebron issue. Rabbi Yosef was even upset that our ministers did not consult him on the vote.

Yishai confirms this: "Were the nominee a leading anti-religious figure it would have been an issue for a party line. But as it was, we saw no need to oppose Bar-On. Besides, Deri could not have cooked up a plea bargain with Bar-On because such deals are made with the prosecutors and the police, with the assent of the judges in the case, and not so

screen in bold print - that "it is important to stress that in this affair Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu himself was not privy to the plea bargain Bar-On promised Deri."

Hasson sought to maintain that this is not tantamount to backtracking and doesn't detract from the importance and credibility of her story, but no one would buy this in the Likud, where there is no doubt that her real target was Netanyahu.

"TV luminaries excitedly talked about this story bringing the government down and about Watergate palling in comparison to Bibigate," said Likud Knesset faction chairman Michael Eitan.

"An investigation must be launched into who is responsible for the fact that Netanyahu's name was dragged into this, whether it was due to gross carelessness or to premeditated malice and why it took over 48 hours of mudslinging for the IBA to admit that Netanyahu is not involved in any conspiracy," he said.

Eitan continued to say that "it cannot be that these people treat the state microphone in their hands as a license to malign and insinuate at will and without impunity."

Gil Samsonov, the Likud's representative on the IBA board of directors, is taking the matter to the police and the state attorney. "The very fact that TV changed its tune about the PM shows its story is false," he asserts. Justice Minister Tzahi Hanegbi demanded that "TV disclose all the evidence it claims to possess so that we can see if it is indeed a million tons of poured concrete or a micro-milligram of fiberglass."

Feeling vindicated and indignant, the Likud is now on the warpath, sure that retribution will at some point be exacted because this time TV crossed a thick red line. Netanyahu often charged that the IBA opposed his

election and couldn't reconcile itself to the result, so it had become the bon ton to snipe at him and even at his toddler sons. The IBA just did not know when to stop, those close to Netanyahu argue.

His spokesman Shai Hazak wants an apology, for "the fact that for two days state TV let the public understand that the prime minister is responsible for a horrid conspiracy described in mafia adjectives."

"That this went on without substantiation, and despite the most emphatic denials on our part, is no trifling matter that we can overlook. This is a criminal charge. But then suddenly,

'Please produce just one little grain of the million tons of poured concrete of evidence.'

— Shlomo Benizri

almost on the sly, they briefly note that Netanyahu was not involved. The least that could be expected is a public apology for a smear campaign of the worst sort. This will not be swept under the rug, forgotten and forgiven."

THE NRP is already quivering because of the Likud's vengeful fury. In the religious sector, the NRP has taken some hard knocks because of the prevalent speculation that it is either directly or indirectly responsible for the explosion. Being even remotely suspected of snitching will not earn it points in its constituency, especially as the upshot may be the weakening of the national camp's own government.

No matter what uncomfortable contortions the NRP performs, it cannot escape the fact that the story began with it.

On the day the Bar-On appointment was approved by the cabinet, reports say that the NRP was dissatisfied with the fact that Shas's ministers supported the appointment. The NRP was said to have hinted at prior coordination with Shas and to have accused Shas of selling out Hebron to ensure the appointment of Bar-On, who would obligingly help Deri. This was immediately featured in all the electronic and print media, including the Post.

The essence of Channel 1's scoop was not new. Hasson just embellished and elaborated on it. The question in the political arena is whether anyone whispered in her ear and let her in on real evidence or on mere innuendo.

Though Channel 1 prefers to gloss over the fact that the basic elements of its story were already out, the NRP is haunted by its "original sin." NRP MK Shaul Yahalom succeeded in bringing it back to the headlines when he couldn't resist a potshot at his arch party's foe. "Our ministers suspected at the cabinet session that a deal had been cooked up with Shas. Maybe they got some information that Shas wanted to gain something on the side. Our ministers are responsible level-headed people who do not invent things."

This was a headache Yahalom's party did not need. Shas grasped at the Yahalom utterance as further proof that the NRP is behind the row, but, worse still, Netanyahu put in a phone call to NRP leader Zevulun Hammer and asked for clarification.

In other words, he wanted to know on whose side the NRP was. Hammer quickly expressed regret over "Yahalom's unfortunate words. We opposed Bar-On not because we knew about a nefarious deal but only because we didn't know him," he rushed to explain. Political observers bet that after Shas, the most sleep is being lost by the NRP.

LABOR IS also trying hard to escape unpleasantness and with a

lot more success. As the antagonists prepared to draw their six-shooters, Labor prudently got out of the way. Considering its trigger-happy response team, it has remained inordinately pacifist throughout the entire blow-up. The candidates for party leadership said nothing at all for a long time and the present leader, Shimon Peres, explained that "there is no point in opening fire when we don't know the facts. If the police investigation finds that there really was such a conspiracy then we will let our outraged voices be heard. But what if it isn't so? Why stick our necks out? This is too serious a matter for knee-jerk reactions. We would do better to wait and see. No political or ideological differences exist here. It's best to evince a little sense and responsibility."

So much so that Peres even came out against a lukewarm Labor bureau resolution calling for an inquiry. There were some whispers around him that this is all due to the fact that he hasn't yet lost his hope of entering a national unity coalition, a move which will cement his stature as the Labor No. 1. For that he not only needs not to hit Netanyahu below the belt but most of all he cannot alienate Deri who controls 10 Knesset seats. Deri, despite his low spirits, still holds the key to any national unity move.

MERETZ CONSIDERS this another example of "the fact that Labor has not adjusted itself to its role in the opposition. They think they are still running things and they need to equivocate, explain, consider and refrain from vexing the religious parties. They must adhere to some unseen center and heaven forbid not veer to the left," as Yossi Sarid charges acerbically.

As soon as Sarid heard Channel 1's story, he speedily submitted a complaint to the police. "I know the TV story sounded unbelievable but we have seen so much that is unbelievable proven as real."

"This matter had to be acted upon, which is why I had to involve the police. We are not a milquetoast opposition like Labor. As I see it, our job is to take Bibi Netanyahu, pack him up and run him out of town."

Providing, of course, that the lawmen do not conclude differently and go after the hell-raisers instead.

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Bar-On/Hebron Affair

Avigdor Lieberman has denied all charges...

Shas MK (Channel 1) identified...

Ehud Olmert...

Benjamin Netanyahu...

the police should launch an investigation into her allegations...

lenged Channel 1 to turn any and all evidence of a possible conspiracy over to the police's investigation committee.

He denies having struck any deal with Deri.

Roni Bar-On A dyed-in-the-wool Likud activist and criminal lawyer...

Tzahi Hanegbi The Justice Minister, whose brief legal career was launched at Bar-On's firm where he did his articles, is one of the prime minister's closest proteges. He chal-

Dan Avi-Yitzhak Deri's attorney. Refused the position of attorney general since he is still committed to defending Deri against long-standing charges of fraud.

The sparks are still showering in all directions from Channel 1's explosive story on the alleged political deal that swapped a vital Hebron vote for dumping Roni Bar-On in the attorney-general's chair.

affair but quickly turned into the Channel 1/government war. If the story is true, ministers and MKs agree the government may have to go. If it isn't, the television directors may start packing their bags.

As the Bar-On/Hebron conspiracy idea continues to circulate, the role of the media may change from investigator to investigated, Michal Yudelman reports

minister demanded a thorough investigation. Sources from his office said he would not hesitate to accept a lie-detector test. This was retracted the next day by a statement: "The prime minister has no intention of taking any such test."

assured us it had? And would Channel 1 expose its sources, violating that most sacred of the professional journalist's principles after truthful reporting?

into the prime minister's involvement, or innocence, in the whole affair? And what was to be made of Bar-On's appointment as attorney general?

talk show, Stern found himself attacked by panelist Tommy Lapid - a former director-general of the Israel Broadcasting Authority - and a number of others.

They erupted into hoarse shouts when Stern said if the court issues an injunction ordering television to reveal its sources, he would "consider further steps," rather than acquiesce.

"There is definitely a feeling we're being attacked," conceded Stern afterwards. "We are not the defendants or the criminals. The ones who made a shady deal were the politicians, not the media which exposed it."

"All these demands for our sources... A story like this cannot come from an open source. It can only come from someone who is not interested in coming out."

"In the United States there was Watergate - not that I'm comparing. Today, 25 years later, they still don't know who 'Deep Throat' was. The Washington Post has not revealed his or her name to this day. So did that stop the truth from coming out? No. Did that prevent Nixon from resigning? No."

Stern said the case may not even reach the stage in which the police ask the court for an order to Channel 1 to expose its sources. "The best detectives are onto it and they don't need our sources to reach the truth. All they need to do is question the people involved."

"Politicians here are going crazy because they don't know what we have and what we don't. That's what's eating them. They don't care about the rule of law or proper conduct. All they care about is what we know, what we have on them."

"The story became so big that some fear the government is hanging in the balance, everyone's denying everything and there's a big mess."

All we need, advises Stern, "is a little patience. In the end the whole truth will come out. This I can assure you."

The bombshell in a nutshell

According to Channel 1 news reporter Ayala Hasson, Roni Bar-On's short-lived appointment as attorney-general was part of a deal made with Shas MK Aryeh Deri, who is on a long-running trial for corruption. Deri allegedly assured the cabinet of Shas's support for the Hebron agreement in exchange for a plea bargain in his trial. The plea bargain would get him off with a conviction "without disgrace" which would enable him to continue his political career and be a minister.

The deal was allegedly concocted by the director-general of the prime minister's office Avigdor Lieberman, Deri, and the prominent Likud functionary and millionaire, David Appel. It is not clear at what stage Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu became familiar with the deal, if at all.

According to the story, Appel was the one who proposed Bar-On to Deri, saying, "I have an attorney-general with wonderful qualities from our point of view." Deri then met Bar-On and the two sealed the pact.

Deri informed Lieberman and Netanyahu that Shas would quit the government unless Bar-On was appointed. Netanyahu and Lieberman advised Justice Minister Tzahi Hanegbi that Bar-On was the preferred candidate. A few days before the Hebron agreement, Deri heard that Avi-Yitzhak was the prime minister's favorite candidate. He announced Shas's objection to the Hebron accord.

Lieberman then hurried to Deri and promised again that Bar-On would be appointed. Shas removed its objection, the Hebron agreement and reappointment sailed through and Bar-On got his appointment. Briefly. M.Y.

double-checked, not only me but my superiors as well. We knew the case would have to be capable of withstanding and winning a libel suit. Everything I reported was true."

At the same time, Channel 1 staff were rather baffled by the ambivalent reaction of the rest of the media to the television's mind-boggling scoop - a real Israeli Watergate.

On the one hand, admiration for Hasson was universal. On the other hand, it was not entirely untainted by professional jealousy. Some of her colleagues gave Hasson a reserved public pat on the back, then went on to chide Channel 1 for not providing more solid proof. They suggested the story should not have been published without such proof.

One reason for the sour grapes was that in some editorial offices,

inexplicably turned inwards on themselves. There was plenty of meat for the sinking of teeth, as bemused TTV people are quick to point out.

The involvement of Deri, a man swirling in criminal charges, in the appointment of the state attorney-general, was especially unsavory and smacked of mafia tactics and banana-republic indignity, as politicians and legal experts rushed to point out. What's more, they noted, Deri is not even a minister, by virtue of the Supreme Court ruling that a man facing such serious charges is unworthy of sitting in the cabinet. So how come he has veto on the appointment of the attorney-general of the State of Israel?

And why did the press not dig deeper into the shady connections between Lieberman, Deri and millionaire David Appel - another one facing criminal charges? Who dug

double-checked, not only me but my superiors as well. We knew the case would have to be capable of withstanding and winning a libel suit. Everything I reported was true."

At the same time, Channel 1 staff were rather baffled by the ambivalent reaction of the rest of the media to the television's mind-boggling scoop - a real Israeli Watergate.

On the one hand, admiration for Hasson was universal. On the other hand, it was not entirely untainted by professional jealousy. Some of her colleagues gave Hasson a reserved public pat on the back, then went on to chide Channel 1 for not providing more solid proof. They suggested the story should not have been published without such proof.

One reason for the sour grapes was that in some editorial offices,

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Letting them have their say

If Israeli emigrants are given the right to vote, they could play a crucial role in determining future election results. **Tom Tugend** in Los Angeles, **Marilyn Henry** in New York, **Douglas Davis** in London, and **Uriel Heilman** in Jerusalem report

Israeli emigrants have greeted the prospect that they will be allowed to vote in their homeland's future elections with enthusiasm, ambivalence and opposition. Under a bill passed in its preliminary reading by a sharply divided Knesset, holders of valid Israeli passports will for the first time be able to cast their ballots abroad.

The best current data indicate that some 600,000 Israelis live outside the Jewish state. Roughly 350,000 of these would be eligible to vote, enough to fill between eight and 10 of the 120 Knesset seats. Knowledgeable observers believe that the majority of the expatriates, possibly up to 65 percent, would vote for the Likud and parties of the right, and it is not by coincidence that the Knesset bill, dubbed the Emigrants' Law, is being championed by the Likud while most on the left are bitterly opposed.

Yossi Beilin, a candidate for the Labor party leadership, said, "The cynicism of the ostensibly nationalist camp has reached new heights with a proposal which will allow former Israelis who aban-

doned us to send our children to the next war."

Jewish organizations in the US on the whole welcomed the proposal. "I'm not an Israeli; the elections are for Israelis to decide," said Leon Levy, chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations. "But if this means that we consider world Jewry as part of Israel, it's a good thing."

Shimon Erem, chairman of the Los Angeles Council of Jewish Organizations, was more assertive. "Just as Americans living in Israel vote in US elections, we should not be denied the right to take part in Israeli elections," he said.

Individual Israelis were more divided in their opinions about the prospect of gaining the right to vote. "We would like to state our opinion and that is the only way we can do it," said Asher Nazarian, a computer analyst from Jerusalem, now living in Fort Lee, New Jersey. "It's not that you are deciding for someone else what the political outcome of the election is going to be. You are deciding for yourself - maybe not for

the short run, but you are deciding the shape of your country."

But, Nazarian said, there should be a restriction on who should have the right to vote. "Maybe you could put a time limit on it - how long you have been away. Maybe someone who has been here for 30 years might be less interested in voting to begin with."

"I have mixed feelings, but overall I am against it," said Ari Aisner, a Jerusalemite living in Queens, New York. "I don't think it's really right if you don't live there. When there is an election, in my heart, I am eager to participate, but in my mind I say no."

He also raised the prospect that the legislation could potentially create a political power outside of Israel. "Israelis who live in New York could have their own party; they could get one or two mandates."

In Los Angeles, home to between 60,000 and 100,000 Israelis, reactions were also divided. Psychologist Isaac Berman said, "I am of two minds, because I would vote here as an American

Continued on Page 18

The departing Russian envoy is not entirely satisfied with the development of relations between his country and Israel, reports Steve Rodan

Alexander Bovin arrived in Tel Aviv more than five years ago convinced that Moscow's relationship with Israel could be a friendly one. Today, he is preparing to leave his post as the first Russian ambassador to this country with some regret that the friendship isn't warmer.

In the end, the 66-year-old Bovin says, some things are hard to change. "During my mission [1991-96], Russian-Israeli relations have moved from level zero up to a level one can consider normal," he says. "But not as one would like it to be. To my regret, one can still feel distrust accumulated for previous decades from both sides."

Amnon Sela, a Russian expert at Hebrew University, agrees. "The great Russian aliyah hasn't resulted in particularly warm relations," he says. "I am not saying there isn't positive expression but it is very roundabout. There is a large Russian community here but there hasn't been any sign in Russian-Israeli relations that both countries feel it is worth it."

Indeed, just May, Bovin told Jewish Agency chairman Avraham Burg that Moscow is not pleased with the efforts to encourage immigration from Russia. He said the emigration is causing a brain drain and urged Israelis to understand "the psychological difficulty that Russian residents feel amid the activities for the emigration of Jews - good and talented people that are leaving our country and are coming to Israel."

Diplomatic sources say Bovin has been disappointed with the government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. The hurt is personal. He honestly thought that the Likud government would accord him the same access that it does the ambassadors of the US and Egypt.

But the Russian ambassador was quickly disillusioned. Foreign Minister David Levy, soon after he entered office in June, met with US ambassador Martin Indyk and then Egypt's envoy Mohammed Bassiouny. Bovin waited impatiently for an appointment. He finally met Levy on September 3.

"It was a bad start for a new government," a diplomatic source says. "And don't forget Bovin is close to Russian Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov."

The result is that Bovin does not feel much of a change in Russian-Israeli relations. Russian officials complained that during the tenure of Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres, Moscow was dismissed as a factor in the Middle East. But has the Netanyahu government given Moscow the role it wants in the region?

"For the time being, I don't feel like it has," says Bovin. "However, the status of Moscow depends, first of all, on its own steps and its own policy."

The disappointment has extended to industrial cooperation as well. When Israel and Russia

exchanged ambassadors in 1991, both countries felt the sky was the limit. Russia had oil, Israel had food. Russia had the industrial base, Israel had the know-how in high-tech. Russia had access to the Third World markets, Israel had a base in the US.

The result was that trade steadily increased from \$44 million in 1992 to \$350 million in 1996, with Israel selling more than \$250 million to Russia. But Israelis quickly encountered problems in industrial cooperation. And Russia was deteriorating. There was political instability in Moscow and the legal system was collapsing.

The most promising area for the two countries was the aviation and defense industries. In 1992, Israel Aircraft Industries signed a contract with the Moscow-based Russian jet manufacturer Ya'acov Lev, for the design and production of a business jet called Galaxy.

The Israeli role was the dominant one. It would design the jet and supply the avionics. The Russian role was to supply the fuselage, an important system but not something that would involve advanced technology.

It didn't work. Ya'acov Lev pumped out MiG jets in the 1970s and 1980s but in the 1990s the company was floundering. "They couldn't perform what they promised," a defense industry

source recalls. "Their problem is organization, doing things on time. They just weren't reliable."

"I don't think they're ready for commercial ventures," an industry source says. "It's not that they're not capable. The bottom line is that until you have a deal you don't have a deal."

IAI and Ya'acov Lev had an amiable parting and the Israelis formed a partnership with the Chicago-based Pritzker Group. But Israeli executives drew a lesson. The Russians were not ready for commercial business, particularly in the West.

INSTEAD, ISRAEL has tried to work with Russia in other areas of the world. One project is to supply China with an upgraded Russian Ilyushin 76 early-warning jet. Beijing insisted on the Ilyushin because of its Soviet-based air force.

Again, there are problems. Despite what the Israelis insist are pledges that date back to 1995, Moscow has not approved the transfer of the jet. Meanwhile, a \$250 million deal remains suspended.

"This is at the top of our agenda in Russian-Israeli relations," a defense official says.

Privately, Israeli defense sources say the reason might be political. They trace the opposition from Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov, who arrived in Israel last April during Operation Grapes of Wrath. Then-prime minister Shimon Peres offended Primakov

by refusing to participate in the Russian initiative to stop the fighting in

Lebanon, a n d Beirut.

edly agreed to see him. "He's still angry about that," a defense source says.

For his part, Bovin is cryptic. "I was not involved in the negotiations on this theme," he says. "The ambassador pleads ignorance on Israel-Russian efforts at defense cooperation. He recalls the December 1995 memorandum of defense cooperation that called for exchanges of military delegations and joint ventures in marketing weapons to other countries. Since then, Israeli officials have tried to interest their Russian counterparts in joint ventures to upgrade MiGs around the world."

"We spoke to them several times about this and they never got back to us," a defense source says.

"In the field of weapons cooperation, there isn't much we can buy from them," Hebrew University's Sela says. "We don't have anything to buy. Maybe they can use hi-tech from us."

"Israel is very developed in industry, even compared to Russia," he adds. "Russia does not produce products for a country like Israel. It produces a lot of raw material. There isn't a lot we can work on."

An analyst on the Russian arms industry, who did not want to be identified, agrees. He says that in the Russian industries, which became the biggest arms exporter in 1996, feel they can go it alone. "If one were to be able to put together Chinese financing, Russian air frames and Israeli technology systems, that would be one terrific plane," the analyst says. "The problem is making the collaboration work. It's definitely a political problem. The military industry people come from a certain background. We've always been the enemy. The shift is hard. It's hard to make a collaboration with the Israelis. It's psychologically hard."

For his part, Bovin is extremely vague on the level of Russian defense cooperation with Israel. "I suppose you mean the memorandum on mutual aid," he says. "The exchange of military delegations provided in it is developing in accordance to the plans."

Israeli officials say they see the positive side of relations. They say Russian-Israeli ties have become more intense, particularly with the Netanyahu government. They point to last October's visit of Primakov to Israel. Both Russian and Israeli officials agreed the visit improved relations between



Bovin: To my regret, one can still feel distrust.

(Uriel Heilman)

How other countries treat their expats

By TOM GROSS

Like Israel, Ireland has a large diaspora, a politically charged environment, and unresolved political problems of vital national importance. And like Israel, it has until now decided not to allow those outside the country to influence its future.

At present the situation in the two countries is almost identical, in the sense that the only Irish citizens who can vote if they are not in Ireland on election day are diplomats and a select band of senior members of the army and navy," says Irish ambassador to Israel Brendan Scannell. "If someone goes on vacation on the day of the election, they can't vote."

Political pressure to change this state of affairs is growing, says Scannell. "I know of at least one group in the US dedicated to lobbying for the right of emigrants to vote."

About one million Irish-born citizens currently live out of Ireland (mostly in Britain and the US), compared to a population of about 4 million in the country. If the emigrants could vote they would potentially account for 20 percent of seats in the Irish parliament, the Dáil.

In addition, Ireland, like Israel, is very generous when it comes to granting citizenship - you only have to prove you have one Irish grandparent. This means that were citizens abroad given the vote, millions of people could potentially acquire citizenship, and tip the balance in some crucial future national election, for example one that plays a role in determining the future status of Northern Ireland.

Another country with a big diaspora, Italy, takes a similar approach: at present the five million Italians living outside Italy cannot vote, although there are "repeated ongoing attempts by parties of the right to

change the law," said one expert.

The United States, on the other hand, is extremely generous to those who have left its shores. In both federal and local elections, American citizens can vote wherever they are in the world. Whether they are on vacation, have lived abroad for 40 years, or have never even lived in the US, Americans cannot be disenfranchised. All they have to do is send an absentee ballot form to the Board of Elections in a state with which they can prove some ties. Depending on which state they choose, it may be as simple as showing they have a bank account, a mailing address, or a driving license in that state.

At around 40 percent, voter turnout among the three million US expats at presidential elections is not far short of turnout in the US, although the proportionately relatively small number of Americans living abroad means they are unlikely to have much impact on election results.

Continued on Page 18

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AGAINST THE GRAIN



By HILLEL FALKIN

There is, you may have noticed, something wildly paradoxical in the debate over extending voting rights to Israelis living abroad...

Dealing with those who want out

In reality, of course, the right supported the law in order to increase the electoral proportion of Jews to Arabs...

over the years, there is no one living here who doesn't have ex-Israeli friends or family members residing more or less permanently abroad...

doubts about being here... but nevertheless... there were moments when one wondered... or found oneself fantasizing about the life one would be leading if...

just her initial.) "Sure," I said. We all live in the same town. "You know her son?" "Yes. He just got out of the army, didn't he?"

A VIEW FROM NOV



By MOSHE KOHN

Mr. Shapiro or Mr. Rapaport, whose names do not necessarily proclaim a priestly connection, as do Cohen or Kagan, comes to the rabbinar with his bride-to-be to register for marriage...

The kohen in the chromosome

And the Halacha, the biblical/talmudic law that is the exclusive authority here in matters pertaining to marriage and divorce, forbids a kohen to marry a divorcee...

It transpired that Kaplan is a popular Turkish surname, meaning "tiger," like the Arabic name Nimr. Katz (9) is the acronym for the Hebrew kohen zedek, meaning "authentic kohen..."

patience for their unpronounceable and unspellable Slavic names. Some adopted those names, without regard for their kohanik implications...

to the reading of the Torah and to carry the Torah in the Simhat Torah festivities; standing before the congregation and pronouncing the Priestly Benediction...

SHABBAT SHALOM



By SHLOMO RESKIN

"Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Six days shall you labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God..."

Convinced - not coerced

they stood at the foot of the mountain" (Ex. 19:17). R. Abdimi b. Hama b. Hasa comments that the verse comes to teach us that God picked up the mountain and held it over our heads like a barrel...

divorce, but refuses to do so, "he may be forced [physically and/or emotionally] until he says 'I want to.'" But if a divorce must be given of the husband's free will...

is your lower will; your higher will really wants to go to synagogue!" But this hardly takes into account the democratic rights of a minority.

agreement between all members of society. But when it comes to areas of ritual between man and God, any enforced action will only empty the deed of any semblance of Divine service.



FUNDS



By BEVERLEE BLACK

Winter has come with a vengeance. After weeks of "Indian summer" which resulted in prayers all around for rain, winter has now arrived with snow on the Hermon, floods in the Negev and dinghies rescuing stranded motorists in Ra'anana and Herzliya...

Help fight the cold

Winter has come with a vengeance. After weeks of "Indian summer" which resulted in prayers all around for rain, winter has now arrived with snow on the Hermon, floods in the Negev and dinghies rescuing stranded motorists in Ra'anana and Herzliya...

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GRAPEVINE

The mayor of what????

By GREER FAY CASHMAN

Freudian slip. Hadassah past president Bernice S. Tannenbaum, in welcoming former Jerusalem mayor Teddy Kollek to the inaugural ceremony of Hadassah's Women of Distinction awards, referred to him as "the former mayor of Hadassah."

HONOREES IN the Hadassah awards brought members of their families to the presentation ceremony, which explains the presence of the president of the state, who this time was relegated to the audience, while his wife, Reuma Weizman, the first of the recipients, sat on stage. Weizman, who was singled out for setting an example in volunteerism through her work with Micha, Yael Sarah and other organizations, grew up in a Hadassah home. Her late mother, Rachel Schwartz, was recruited in the 1920s by Hadassah founder Henrietta Szold. After Weizman completed her response to the award, her husband bounded on stage to give her a big kiss, then turned to the large gathering and said "Soon, I will have spent 47 years with my wife and that's a story in itself, the book of which she may write."

FOR SOME people, life begins at 40, and for others it continues well past 80. Case in point is Abba Eban, who celebrates his 82nd birthday this coming Sunday. Eban is still in frequent demand on

both the lecture and television appearance circuits. The former foreign minister's principal assignment, the PBS film on the peace process, with a planned premiere for November, already has the promised participation of King Hussein, Hosni Mubarak, Yasser Arafat and Shimon Peres. In a typical Ebanism, he has termed the Oslo accord as "one of the wonders of the world - conceived by Labor and born with the indispensable aid of Likud midwives." Eban is also a major player in the BBC six-part series on the Arab-Israeli conflict which is currently under production, and will be the central figure in a biographical study of himself by the company that produced the Einstein TV movie. His book on *Diplomacy after the Cold War* is due for release later this year and will be a follow-up to his best-selling *The New Diplomacy*. Henry Kissinger, with whom Eban meets frequently, has told him "it's very intelligent to write about the future because there is nothing on the ground to refute what one writes."

LABOR CHAIRMAN Peres, who gave the closing address to the Hadassah mid-winter convention, must have squirmed at the inaccuracies read out in his lengthy CV. When it was finally his turn to speak, Peres apologized for having "such a tiring biography" which took "such a long time to describe." After sharing his view of the future of the country, Peres said that he



Mazal Gibli, the former housekeeper of David Ben-Gurion, celebrates the wedding of her grandson, author Raz Nadav, along with his bride, film animator Lena Kleiner. (Sivan Farag)

would entertain questions, but no one raised her hand to ask about either peace or education, which were his two key themes. It was quite a chance for the Saturday night session on pluralism when

delegates kept firing questions at the speakers till almost midnight, and might have gone on indefinitely had they been permitted.

WHEN SHE arrived home on a

visit earlier this month, Ofra Haza expressed the wish to cut a new album here. But now she's doing better than that; she's starring in a new Israeli movie *Absolute Justice*, which is based on the subject of Yemenite infants who disappeared without trace in the early years of the state. The choice of Haza as the big international name in the film's list of credits is particularly apt, since she herself is of Yemenite origin. Shooting is due to start next month.

IN THE 20 years in which she served as housekeeper to Paula and David Ben-Gurion, Mazal Gibli got to know many of the country's movers and shakers and maintained contact with them long after she stopped working for Israel's first prime minister. Some of them, including Esther Rubini, Gibli's former employer of 20 years from whom the Ben-Gurions "stole" her services, were among the huge crowd invited to the Gan Oranin wedding of her grandson, author Raz Nadav, to film animator Lena Kleiner. Conspicuous by his absence was Shimon Peres, who makes a point of responding favorably to nearly all of Gibli's invitations. A previous commitment abroad forced him to give this one a miss.

IN AN exclusive interview with Dan Rafter on CBS, grieving father Bill Cosby, whose son Ennis was murdered in Los Angeles earlier this month, admitted to marital infidelity but denied a paternity claim by his former lover.

WHAT DO Bruce Willis, Liam Neeson, Matthew McConaughey, Sean Connery and Richard Gere have in common? All were approached to star in Universal's upcoming remake of *The Day of the Jackal*. Each declined for a variety of reasons, but in the final analysis, Willis, who was the initial choice reconsidered, and decided that he could reshuffle his other commitments.

ALMOST AS zany off screen as on, Bette Midler, one of the stars of *First Wives Club*, tells the story of how she once backed into her boyfriend's mother's car because she thought it was his. When her panic-stricken boyfriend informed her that his mother had no insurance, Midler's typical rejoinder was "That's tough."

THE WEEK THAT WAS

If one little leaker should accidentally fall...

By MICHAL YUDELMAN

As the nation speculated who might be the 'deep throat' who tossed TV Channel 1 the juicy bone of the Roni-Bar-On-for-Hebron Shas-swap, an interesting sidelight on the mystery flickered briefly in a corner of the presidential residence.

After the judges' inauguration ceremony at Beit Hanassi, three journalists struck up a chummy chat with Justice Minister Tzahi Hanegbi.

One of them, *The Jerusalem Post's* Batsheva Tsur, asked the minister who, in his opinion, might possibly be the secret source of the government-shaking story.

Hanegbi answered with a wide grin: "Well, only four people were at the meeting where the Bar-On appointment was discussed. So, you have four possibilities. The prime minister obviously was not interested in leaking it, nor does his director-general Avigdor Lieberman. So unless you think it was me, it must have been Attorney Dan Avi-Yitzhak."

Tsur: "I then asked Justice Ministry spokeswoman Etti Eshed whether I had heard correctly and she confirmed what Hanegbi had said, but she added it was merely background material which should be attributed only to a government source."

Later that evening, Tsur called Hanegbi himself to re-confirm. "At this point he said 'I was just kidding.'"

This poses the question of just how seriously a journalist should take the minister's jokes.

Tsur then spoke to Avi-Yitzhak. He said he did not want to comment at that moment but "the truth will come out."

HOUSEKEEPING

Knesset Speaker Dan Tichon hastily denied reports that he hired the Gitam/BDDO advertising company to improve the Knesset's image, after receiving a shower of angry reactions.

Many people called to remind Tichon that Gitam's media whiz Moshe Teomim had served as Peres's image adviser in the elections, and we all know what became of that.

You got it all wrong, said Tichon, noting that he had indeed met Teomim, but only as part of a series of talks with media advisers to find out why the Knesset's image isn't improving.

Maybe someone should tip off the speaker that the spin doctors don't have much chance of sprucing up the Knesset's image while its members seem intent on going in the opposite direction.

"A thousand image consultants won't be able to improve the Knesset's image," said Labor's Dalia Izik. She pointed out that the personal elections for prime minister, has lost almost all its power. As long as the prime minister shows contempt for the House and

hardly goes there if he can help it, the situation will only get worse.

"If the goods are bad, they will be impossible to market," stated Likud's MK Ruby Rivlin. Meretz's MK Yossi Sarid added: "As long as the bad apples are on top, it will be difficult to sell the whole box. If the rotten ones are removed, there will be no need for public relations to sell the parliamentary merchandise."

And how can public sympathy for MKs be tapped as long as they cut themselves off from the real world of the citizens' problems and continue to fatten their own pay packets?

Tichon's urge for a PR fix, it has been suggested, arises from the Knesset's emergence from recent events smelling of something not quite roses.

One was the invasion of the House by Channel 2 comedian Eli Yatzpan, who asked the MKs questions as part of his Friday night comedy act. Another was that irksome decision by MKs to raise their own salaries.

Another contribution came from the exposure of the rather costly renovations in the chambers of the Speaker himself - something in the NIS 120,000 ball park, plus or minus diddly squat. But who's counting anymore!

DUST BITERS

Binyamin Netanyahu's office deserves its own book of records for short-lived appointments. No, not the six-hour attorney-general this time, but this week his bureau chief, Brig. Gen. (res.) David Agmon, announced his resignation and bit the dust after three months in the job.

"I've had it with them," he said succinctly, "they're impossible to work with." Agmon, the equivalent of the mighty Eitan Haber in the late prime minister Yitzhak Rabin's bureau, found himself cut off from the political center and the decision-making by Netanyahu's aides Danny Naveh, Avigdor Lieberman and others. Even the prime minister's schedule and appointments diary, his main duty, was taken beyond his grasp by the chief secretary, Ruhama Avraham.

Among other appointments which haven't worked out - Bar-On of course, Ya'acov Ne'eman as justice minister, Jacob Frenkel as finance minister, attorney Avi Halevy as office legal adviser, and David Ivri as head of the still-born national security council. Two others in the bureau, Rami Simsolo, Netanyahu's adviser on Arab affairs, and Shmuel Cohen, a political adviser, are departing soon.

Former Tsomet director-general, Doron Shmueli, was offered Agmon's job. But his candidacy immediately swam under a cloud when it became known that he is among those suspected of illegally pulling confidential documents out of the military archives for possible use against political rivals.

RUSSIA

Continued from Page 10

ally of the Arab states," said Bovin. "Our voting in the UN is not determined by 'returning to Arabs.' It is determined by the Russian Foreign Ministry in accordance with our understanding of the situation in the Middle East."

"It would be naive, to say the least, to demand from Moscow to see the world with the eyes of Israelis or Arabs. Neither the former nor the latter have their own monopoly on justice. That's why there is neither a need for offense nor for hysteria. But there is a need for constructive dialogue which would help to understand different point of view. As for Russia, it is open for such a dialogue."

And how does Bovin explain Russia's policy of selling nuclear equipment, missiles and submarines to Iran? Is this a way to gain influence in the region, or will Russia sell to anyone who pays cash? "Russia needs money. This motive is, at the present moment and in this given case, the chief one," claims Bovin. "Certainly, we are taking into account not only sums in cash but political factors too. But Russia has no interest in destabilizing the situation in the Near and the Middle East."

REGARDING DOMESTIC issues, Israeli police sources say that over the past three years suspected Russian mobsters have found a safe haven in Israel. "I have not received from Moscow

any direction about these 'Russian mobsters,'" says Bovin. "And principally, I can say nothing. This is a question of fact. Are there really such mobsters in Israel or not? All my attempts to find out this fact from different Israeli organizations have not succeeded."

Still, Bovin is preparing to leave Israel amid a flurry of diplomatic activity. Netanyahu is planning to visit Russia in March and Russian diplomats say that some of the outstanding bilateral issues - such as the release of the Ilyushin cargo plane to China - will be resolved. That will be followed by a visit to Moscow by IDF Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Amnon Shahak.

Bovin accepts, with equanimity, his return to Moscow, where his replacement, an Arabic-speaking diplomat, awaits approval from President Boris Yeltsin. "Everything has its beginning and everything has its end," he says. "I have spent enough time in this country. Usually one loses a charm of novelty, a freshness of perception. Without this, the work turns into routine and everyone is bored."

"And besides, I have passed the age of pension. I should make way for those younger than myself."

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Set Back! A SEQUEL

CRYPTIC CROSSWORD

ACROSS

- Just the right thing to take! (11)
- Stirring articles are written about soapstone! (9)
- Exciting start made by five in French street to produce theatrical work (5)
- Finishes the Spanish fuel (6)
- Cooking utensil found on American football field (8)
- Commendation produced quiet increase in salary (6)
- In a hurry to make some notes about a bird (8)
- Terrible actors took 99 attempts at the word puzzle (8)
- Listen in on small insect (6)
- Puts in a thousand vegetables perhaps (8)
- Disorganised engineer involved in poor work, but he does produce a barrel (6)
- Aegean islands are first class - no one returns (5)
- Harem slave found squalid mess, and opposite extremes (9)
- Silvestrian arrangement is of little importance (11)

DOWN

- Bill and Edward got out of bed and behaved badly (5,2)
- Sounds like a bit of tranquillity (5)
- Weights down with work on printing machinery (9)
- Space to tie up (4)
- Take away something that isn't concrete (8)
- Doesn't begin to get geared to having sound detectors (5)
- Mark has 100 of these (7)
- Complete picture, or just a general survey (8)
- A protein which could be a deadly poison (8)
- Muddled alto didn't start aria or perform in the style of an actor (9)
- They gave a skilful performance, but caused our visit to be rescheduled (8)
- Dwelling permanently (7)
- Strange shaped stones (7)
- Pop back for the painting, separately (5)
- Fabric which might cause irritation (5)
- Clever fellow and a soldier are both wise men (4)

SOLUTIONS

YESTERDAY'S QUICK SOLUTION

ACROSS: 1 Lizard, 5 Mayor, 8 Basic, 9 Opulent, 10 Lollard, 11 Lodge, 12 Banger, 14 Insect, 17 Slag, 19 Wrinkle, 20 Overcast, 23 Yacht, 24 Eased, 25 Holiday.

DOWN: 1 Libel, 2 Upbeat, 3 Dicta, 4 Shoddy, 5 Mandin, 6 Field, 7 Retreat, 12 Bespoke, 13 Egghead, 15 Awkward, 16 Twitch, 18 Items, 20 Idly, 21 Easy.

QUICK CROSSWORD

ACROSS

- Pigtail (5)
- Musical exercises (6)
- In the middle of (7)
- Teng (5)
- Flat (4)
- Heraldic animal (7)
- Suitable (3)
- Impartial (4)
- Woman (4)
- Pig's home (3)
- Most abundant (7)
- In this place (4)
- Kanyas tribe (5)
- Consider (7)
- Flag (6)
- Revolving part (5)

DOWN

- Celestial body (6)
- On top of (5)
- Pulls (4)
- Perceptibly (8)
- To do with skin (7)
- Observing (6)
- Very cold (8)
- Helps (7)
- Highly glazed red pottery (6)
- Gape (5)
- Written character (6)
- Choose (5)
- At a distance (4)

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Thursday March 6
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 Tour guide: Dr. Yoash Zohar

Monday March 17
LAND OF MILK AND HONEY
 Cheese, honey, olive oil and wine - we'll taste them all on our way. We'll start at the organic dairy of Kiri, and continue on to the olive oil press at the Druse village of Yanuah, then the prize-winning Daiton winery. We'll also visit the bee hives of Shadmo Dvora and its silk production unit. The Galilee is especially beautiful at this time of the year. Join us! NIS 215 (including lunch)
 Tour guide: Israel Shalem

Tuesday March 25
IRISES ARE BLOOMING IN GILBOA
 Every year in March it happens. Iceses cover Mt. Gilboa. They are the largest, most beautiful and colorful, and some are yellow. We'll visit Nahal Toot on the trail of Iyana, the "Cyclamen Hill" of Gilad and Givat Hamoreh. Lunch at Kibbutz Tirat Zvi. NIS 185 (including lunch)
 Tour guide: Hagar Leshner

Thursday April 3
ACRE - THE CRUSADER CITY
 In July 1099, after they had captured Jerusalem, the Crusaders realized they needed a port with a major harbor. So they turned this small city into an important Crusader stronghold. The markets filled with goods, cloth, jewels and precious stones, for the troops to take home as souvenirs. We'll visit the Hospitaller Quarter and view the new discoveries, the Genoa Quarter - little Italy in the Holy Land, the Templars Quarter, the Turkish Baths and more. NIS 175
 Tour guide: Hagar Leshner

Thursday April 24
IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE SANHEDRIN
 The Bar-Kochba Revolt failed. 600,000 Jews died. Jerusalem was destroyed. Jews were sold as slaves, and Tora study came to an end. But a new center arose in the Galilee, and the towns of Zippori and Tiberias became famous. We'll visit them, as well as Beit Shearim, the burial place of Rabbi Yehuda Hanasi and his family. NIS 215 (including lunch)
 Tour guide: Danny Welks

The tour price includes transportation from Jerusalem or Tel Aviv and return, entrance to all sites, background lectures and on-the-spot explanations. Lunch as indicated. 10% off when you book all five tours. Pick-up and drop-off along the route when possible and arranged beforehand.

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BITS & BYTES

By Jennifer Friedlin

ArelNet sells Arcom software to Intelcam

Cameron's telecommunications company Intelcam has purchased NIS 2.5m. worth of ArelNet's software. The software is designed for a family of message switching wide-area network systems called Arcom. ArelNet is a subsidiary of Yavne-based Arel Communications and Software (Nasdaq: ARLCF). Arel Communications' software manages the receiving, storing and forwarding of messages.

Beta testing of 'push' technology begins

BackWeb Technologies of Ramat Gan and McAfee (Nasdaq: MCAF) of Santa Clara, California recently began beta testing SecureCast, the world's first software distribution service to utilize "push" technology to deliver software applications and updates directly to desktop computers via web browsers. SecureCast is designed to deliver updates of antivirus technology, automatically downloaded in the background so that users are able to protect their systems with the latest security software. BackWeb is a member of the BRM group.

TimeStep to integrate Check Point software

Check Point Technologies Ltd. (Nasdaq: CHKPF) recently announced that TimeStep Corporation of the US will integrate Check Point's Firewall-1 network security software into TimeStep's Permit family of private networking products, and will also resell the entire Firewall-1 product line. TimeStep Corporation, an affiliate of Newbridge Networks Corporation, produces secure virtual private networking solutions that protect an organization's confidential and proprietary data. Check Point of Tel Aviv holds 40% of the worldwide firewall market.

Elonex to incorporate MMX technology

Elonex said that it will incorporate Intel's MMX technology into its line of Pentium computers. MMX, which was developed in Israel, allows computers to operate 10% - 20% more quickly than current systems.

Gilat announces deal with Brazilian lottery

Gilat Satellite Networks Ltd. (Nasdaq: GILTF) of Petah Tikva announced yesterday that Racimac Informatica Brasilia, SA, ordered 1,600 GSAT sites and hub equipment for the national lottery of Brazil. The network will become the second largest lottery-based network in the world after the UK's. Gilat's systems provide satellite-based communications between a central location and geographically dispersed sites.

Nice Systems wins outstanding exporter award

Nice Systems of Tel Aviv (TASE: NICEI) was recently awarded the Israel-British Chamber of Commerce 1996 award for the outstanding exporter to Britain. Nice exported an estimated \$4.5m. to the UK market during 1996. Nice Systems markets a range of computer telephony integration products aimed at the UK's financial market and growing call-center sector.

Sapiens announces three new deals in Japan

Sapiens International Corporation (Nasdaq: SPSI), a provider of client/server solutions recently announced the license of Sapiens ObjectPool to three new customers in Japan. The aggregate value of the licenses is approximately \$1.5m. The three customers, American Family Corporation Japan, Unicharm and Japan Agricultural Coop, will all use the technology for the development of business applications. Sapiens has research and development and marketing offices in Rehovot.

Rad Data releases management tool for WANs

Rad Data Communications recently announced the release of its Radview-HPOV/WAN, a software enhancement for integrated SNMP management of wide-area networks based on a host of Rad's product families. The management software also features at-a-glance summaries of available and allocated E1/T1 resources. Rad Data Communications of Tel Aviv designs a range of product solutions for LAN and WAN applications.

Discount to be ordered to sell off Mercantile

By GALIT LIPKIS BECK

The government will instruct Bank Discount (IDB) to sell off Mercantile Discount Bank during this year, Meir Yacobson, general manager of MI Holdings, the state-owned company in charge of the bank sales, said yesterday.

Mercantile, a wholly owned subsidiary of IDB, is considered a medium-sized bank specializing in the Arab sector. The bank has total assets of NIS 8.25 billion and had net profits of NIS 12.6m. during the first half of 1996.

Mercantile will be sold after IDB's public offering next month. Yacobson said details of the sale are included in IDB's prospectus, which will be distributed to institutional investors next week.

The government initially decided that

Mercantile must be separated from IDB in 1993, in the framework of the Banking Law and the privatization program. Since then, the government has tried to push forward the sale, but legal obstacles and IDB's desire to maintain its holdings have postponed the sale. In recent years, IDB has reaped dividends from Mercantile.

British businessman Bernard Schreier has already notified the Treasury that he plans to bid for control of ownership of Mercantile. At this stage it is unclear whether Schreier will purchase the shares on his own or with another investor.

Schreier initially expressed interest in purchasing Mercantile in 1992, when Barclays of London decided to sell its 50% holding in the subsidiary. At the time the bank was known as Barclays-Discount Bank.

After months of negotiations with Schreier,

Barclays reached an agreement to sell its holdings for 35 million pounds sterling. But a few days after the agreement was reached, IDB notified Barclays that it was exercising its first right of refusal to acquire the shares.

The transaction went through despite Schreier's objections and the fact that IDB did not have the Bank of Israel's approval to control another 50% of Mercantile's shares. In response, the Bank of Israel filed a complaint in court, which eventually ordered IDB to sell off Mercantile entirely.

Shortly after, Schreier filed suit in Tel Aviv District Court, demanding IDB sell him the shares at the same terms of his original agreement with Barclays, and also pay him compensation.

"The sale of Mercantile is at a standstill until the court case is resolved," said a spokesperson for Bank Discount.

Workers, gov't clash over IEC franchise

By DAVID HARRIS

Israel Electric Corporation workers are gearing up to fight a government decision to reduce the company's franchise from 10 years to six.

The national secretary of IEC staff, which held an emergency meeting yesterday, said workers would not allow the move agreed on yesterday to pass without comment.

No specific measures have yet been approved by the secretary, but it will launch a campaign similar to that conducted against the previous government to ensure the franchise continues for a decade.

The ministerial legislative committee decided to reduce the length of the franchise in line with government policy to promote competition to monopolies such as the IEC. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Finance Minister Dan Meridor both support the move, but a senior IEC source said last night that National Infrastructure Minister Ariel Sharon is opposed to reducing the franchise period. However, a source close to Sharon said his opposition is not to the shortening of the franchise, but to the way the change is being brought about.

"The Knesset agreed to a 10-year franchise less than 12 months ago, and already the ministerial committee wants to change it," said the source. If the government is going to make changes to the legal standing of the IEC, it "should implement them all at once, not on a piecemeal basis," the source said. "Such frequent changes send out the wrong message to potential foreign investors."

A 10-year extension of the corporation franchise was approved last March, after Labor MKs overwhelmingly supported the IEC union's demands and opposition MKs largely absented themselves from the vote.

An alternative proposal by former Finance Committee chairman Gedalya Gal (Labor), which would have extended the franchise for only six years, is said to have led to Gal's failed re-election campaign in Labor's primaries.

"For the time-being we are not reacting to the decision," said IEC spokesman Yael Ne'emán.

Histadrut to chart strategy on banks' work week

By GALIT LIPKIS BECK

The Histadrut's bank workers division is scheduled to meet Sunday to decide on a course of action that will allow the entire banking sector to shift from a six- to a five-day work week, division head Zion Shema said this week.

The banks' workers have been pushing for a shorter work week for more than two years. On Monday, the Antitrust Court rejected the plan by the Association of Banks to close Fridays, on grounds that it would severely hinder competition.

Shema said the workers' committee will probably decide to call a general strike.

"We are currently examining the ruling so as to decide what to do at the start of next week," Shema said.

The banks' managements, which agree in principle to the shift to a five-day week, are examining the possibility of operating bank branches six days a week while requiring workers to work five days.

The banks say this will cost them more money, however, and these costs will be passed on to customers in the form of increased commissions and fees.

Meanwhile, Bank Discount workers continued the strike they began on Wednesday to protest the firing of a branch manager suspected of taking part in gambling activities.

A Bank Discount spokesperson defended the dismissal, saying, "The worker betrayed management's trust and did not act appropriately for someone in his position."

Consulates in S.F., Philly may be shut

By DAVID HARRIS

The Foreign Ministry will soon consider proposals to close embassies and consulates around the world, including those in San Francisco and Philadelphia, a ministry source said yesterday.

Faced with the demand to cut NIS 45 million from its 1997 budget the ministry has already begun implementing a series of cutbacks at its representative offices throughout the world.

Those involved in information, public relations and cultural work will no longer be paid overtime. This has provoked deep resentment among staff, particularly in the large embassies in Washington, London and Paris, according to the source.

"They want to know why they're the only ones to be affected," said the source. "They believe that if such cuts have to be made, they should also be targeted at

ancillary staff, such as drivers." Strike action, however, is not anticipated. "It's just something Foreign Ministry workers don't do unilaterally," added the source.

Attention is now turning to the more crucial decision of which embassies and consulates will be closed. Senior ministry officials have a shortlist of 25 representative offices throughout the world.

The list includes the consulates in San Francisco and Philadelphia and the embassy in the Dominican Republic.

A loud outcry is expected from the Jewish communities in California and Pennsylvania if the closures of the consulates there are approved. The Dominican Republic Embassy acts as the office for Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, and the Federation of St. Christopher, St. Kitts and Nevis, in addition to the Dominican Republic itself.

Bayer fined \$50m. for price fixing

By ADRIAN CROFT

SAN FRANCISCO (Reuters) - A US subsidiary of the German chemical giant Bayer AG was fined \$50 million yesterday after pleading guilty to taking part in an international conspiracy to fix citric acid prices.

US District Judge Fern Smith handed down the sentence in San Francisco after accepting a plea agreement between New Jersey-based Haarmann & Reimer Corp and the US Justice Department that was announced earlier in Washington.

She also sentenced Hans Hartmann, a senior executive at

Haarmann & Reimer's German counterpart, to a \$150,000 fine after he pleaded guilty to taking part in the conspiracy.

The Haarmann & Reimer fine was the second largest criminal antitrust fine after the \$100m. fine against Archer Daniels Midland Co., the agricultural products giant, which pleaded guilty to taking part in conspiracies involving two additives last October.

"This \$50 million criminal fine is a clear message to corporations around the world," Attorney General Janet Reno said. "We will not tolerate international conspiracies that defraud American consumers."

Citric acid is a flavor additive and preservative found in soft drinks, processed food, detergents and pharmaceutical products. It is a \$1.2 billion a year industry worldwide.

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Swiss franc (SF 200,000)	0.825	0.750	1.000
Yen (10 million yen)			

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	Buy	Sell	Buy	Sell	
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U.S. dollar	3.2741	3.3270	3.21	3.38	3.3120
German mark	1.9860	2.0252	1.96	2.05	2.1714
Pound sterling	5.3020	5.3875	5.29	5.47	5.3888
French franc	0.5814	0.6010	0.58	0.61	0.5978
Japanese yen (100)	2.8928	2.7383	2.64	2.78	2.7119
Dutch florin	1.7774	1.8051	1.74	1.84	1.7954
Swiss franc	2.2857	2.3307	2.25	2.37	2.3324
Swedish krona	0.4522	0.4595	0.44	0.47	0.4550
Norwegian krona	0.5022	0.5104	0.49	0.52	0.5073
Danish krone	0.5229	0.5314	0.51	0.54	0.5288
Finnish mark	0.8711	0.8820	0.85	0.70	0.8749
Canadian dollar	2.4311	2.4704	2.38	2.51	2.4655
Australian dollar	2.5039	2.5443	2.48	2.58	2.5436
S. African rand	0.7178	0.7294	0.65	0.73	0.7261
Belgian franc (10)	0.9675	0.9832	0.95	1.00	0.9778
Austrian schilling (10)	2.8387	2.8825	2.78	2.93	2.8655
Italian lira (1,000)	2.0352	2.0681	2.00	2.10	2.0475
Jordanian dinar	4.5500	4.6600	4.53	4.88	4.6385
Egyptian pound	0.9300	1.0100	0.93	1.01	1.0184
ECU	3.8685	3.8308	—	—	3.9057
Irish punt	5.2320	5.3164	5.14	5.40	5.2946
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דבריו

NEWS

3 DEAD

Continued from Page 1

Instead, the troops stumbled into a bomb trap laid by Hizbullah, which has claimed responsibility for the attack. CC Northern Command Maj. Gen. Amiram Levine said it appeared that the large explosive device, loaded with metal ball bearings, had been planted recently. The unit commander and his communications officer and another soldier were in the lead when one of them detonated the device, which was apparently linked to a trip wire. The possibility that it was operated by a mine linked to the explosive device or by some other method is not being ruled out.

Levine told reporters yesterday that explosive devices are one of the biggest problems facing troops in south Lebanon. He said the army was trying to deal with them in various ways, including offensive efforts to eliminate or thwart the bomb planters. The army is also taking protective measures, he said, but did not elaborate. Military sources maintained that the relative quiet of the past few weeks has been used by Hizbullah to prepare for future attacks, especially in the coming month, during which the organization marks several commemorative dates. February is a month when it is

cold outside but "hot on the front," Levine said. He noted, however, that memorial dates were not the main motivating factor behind Hizbullah attacks, stressing that the organization was constantly trying to hit the IDF and the SLA. It is also no secret, Levine said, that Hizbullah enjoys the support of Iran and the acquiescence of Syria. The organization's operations, however, are determined primarily by operational factors, including the state of the moon and the weather.

Arieh O'Sullivan contributed to this report.

ZONE

Continued from Page 1

is changing more quickly than the IDF can adjust. Half of the 27 soldiers killed in Lebanon last year died from roadside charges while patrolling or moving in convoys. Last year, IDF soldiers discovered over 100 roadside charges. Sophisticated electronic and mechanical methods are used to locate and safely destroy bombs, as well as dogs specially trained to sniff out explosives. Whenever a bomb is detected, IDF sappers immediately go into action, sealing off the area, questioning soldiers and trying to figure out how Hizbullah planned on using the bomb - all this before disarming it.

This latest bomb blast further underlined the difficulties faced by regular army troops trying to combat highly motivated gunmen using guerrilla-style tactics and operating on their own turf. Hizbullah is sufficiently well-equipped to carry out the hit-and-run operations, long-range shooting attacks on fortified outposts, and roadside bombings that characterize guerrilla warfare. The organization has become more sophisticated in planning and intelligence gathering. It uses local knowledge of terrain and information gained on IDF and SLA movements to optimum advantage.

The Northern Command is well aware of Hizbullah's intelligence advantages and has been acting accordingly, varying the times and places of operations, patrols and convoys. Different methods of supplying outposts have been introduced. Before they begin serving in the security zone, soldiers are now better trained to deal with the terrain in which they will operate, and are taught ways to combat Hizbullah's guerrilla tactics. The disturbing aspect about Wednesday night's bomb attack is that it did not happen alongside a route known to be used by IDF or SLA troops.

The Nahal soldiers were apparently en route to carry out their own ambush when the device exploded. This indicates that Hizbullah had prior knowledge of the route the soldiers would take, even though it was supposed to be a covert operation. The incident also happened in roughly the same area in which Nahal troops clashed with a squad of Amal gunmen about three weeks ago. A Nahal Brigade soldier was killed in that incident, as were three of the gunmen.

The question that has to be answered by Northern Command's inquiry into the latest incident is whether a Hizbullah bomb attack in this area could have been anticipated, given Hizbullah's familiarity with the region and assistance from local residents, and therefore averted by sending the troops to a different ambush point along a more unexpected route.

EDISON

Continued from Page 1

tured at the upcoming Asian Philatelic Exhibition in Hong Kong. Postal Authority spokeswoman Cigal Galil, speaking on behalf of director-general Moshe Tery and philatelic service director Yinnon Beilin, said officials were shocked to hear of the claims, and that the stamp - produced in the form of a commemorative sheet - was intended to show to the world Israel's "openness to universal themes."

The proposal to include Edison on the stamp was made by the authority's stamp-planning committee and approved over a year ago by the Ministerial Committee on Symbols and Ceremonies, then headed by Uzi Baran. Edison and Bell are only the fifth and sixth non-Jews to appear on Israeli stamps, after Eleanor Roosevelt, Harry Truman, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and Raoul Wallenberg.

Galil said a philatelic service research team "looked at the Encyclopedia Ha'Ivrit and found "nothing hinting" at possible antisemitism in Edison's record. They did not look at any biographies, she conceded. "If it's true that he was antisemitic, his inclusion in the stamp was done innocently," she said. She did not rule out the possibility that the stamp issue would be cancelled, but did note that this would entail a financial loss and embarrassment.

"From now on, we will be much more careful in selecting stamp themes and conduct deeper research," Galil said. "But sometimes problems appear where you least expect it," he added, when God's name appeared on a series of synagogue stamps; other Israelis objected when Menachem Begin's stamp appeared with the top of his head left out by the designer, and some religious Jews complained about a series of stamps on dogs and a Chagall stamp with a tiny nude Batsheva.

The possibility that Edison had antisemitic views was raised by Stephen Esrati, a philatelic journalist in Shaker Heights, Ohio, and by Ken Lawrence, a vice president of the 56,000-member American Philatelic Society, who

has long been involved in researching Nazism and who recently prepared an exhibit on Holocaust mail. The Hebrew University's Sassoon Center on Antisemitism was unable to provide concrete information on Edison's views. However, the recent book by noted author Paul Auster, *The Invention of Solitude*, states that Auster's father was hired "for a brief moment" as an assistant in Edison's library "only to have the job taken away from him the next day because Edison learned he was a Jew."

In addition, the 1991 book *What Did They Think of the Jews?*, collected and edited by Allan Gould, specifically deals with charges that the American inventor may have hated Jews.

"Was Edison ... antisemitic? There are some indications that he was," Gould writes. When a series of antisemitic articles appearing in the *Dearborn Independent*, "Edison gave indications of support for that effort." And in a 1924 note to a man named Liebold, he sent a news clipping entitled "Jews are Ruling Soviet Russia," which stated that out of the 48 leaders of the Soviet government, only five were of "pure Russian blood." Edison's attached note says only: "Liebold: This is interesting, Edison."

Motor car developer Henry Ford, known for antisemitic views, sent Edison a complete set of volumes of the *International Jew*, "in a special leather presentation binding. Edison graciously accepted with 'thanks,'" Gould writes. Gould notes, however, that the evidence on Edison's alleged antisemitism is far from conclusive, since except for the notes he wrote when he was an old man, he "never made an antisemitic comment to anyone."

Gould continues: "Was he or wasn't he? The evidence seems to indicate that Edison shared the Populist notion that Wall St. was dominated by Jews, and it was the Jews in the financial professions whom Edison resented.... If Edison was antisemitic, as his notes to his one-time Florida neighbor Ford indicate, then it appears to be the unique form of the disease ... economic antisemitism."

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NEWS

in brief

Hamas warns: Don't extradite Abu Marzook

Hamas warned yesterday that if the US extradites Mousa Mohammed Abu Marzook, the head of the group's political wing, to Israel, it will resume its terror attacks in the region.

Noam Friedman's remand extended

The Central Command Military Court yesterday extended the remand of IDF soldier Noam Friedman, who carried out the shooting in Hebron last month in which six Arabs were wounded.

Pirate radio station shut down

Communications Ministry inspectors yesterday shut down a pirate radio station in Rishon LeZion, whose broadcasts had seriously interfered with communications between jets and Ben-Gurion Airport's control tower.

Boy gets liver lobe transplant from father

A four-year-old boy from Kfar Manda near Nazareth yesterday became the second Israeli to undergo the transplant of a lobe of a liver from a live donor.

Alleged Nazi war criminal living in Canada dies

By ROBERT SARNER and STEVE LEIBOWITZ

The death this week in Canada of the most notorious surviving Nazi war criminal never brought to justice has intensified calls by Jewish leaders for Ottawa to speed up long-delayed legal action against the estimated hundreds of suspected war criminals living in Canada.

EXPATS

Continued from Page 10

As for Israel's neighbors, they take an even more rigid approach than Israel has done up to now. Hundreds of thousands of Jordanians (representing a significant proportion of the country's 4.2 million population) live out of the

SAY

Continued from Page 10

and in Israel as an Israeli. I think your allegiance should be to the place where you have your home and have put down roots. "Nevertheless, I will exercise my right to vote in future Israeli elections in order to express my opinion and have some impact on who leads the country."

Breakthrough in Swiss bank investigation

Commission may waive laws for probe

By BATSHEVA TSUR and news agencies



US Commerce Undersecretary Stuart Eisenstat in Zurich yesterday.

Members of the Swiss Banking Commission said yesterday evening in Zurich that they were prepared to waive Swiss banking laws in order to allow an investigation into the missing Jewish assets from the time of the Holocaust.

warned on Wednesday they might bar government deposits with the banks or make it hard for them to do business in one of the world's top financial centers unless Switzerland compensates Holocaust survivors.

SYRIASPEAK

Continued from Page 7

"When you are in official talks, commitments are formal," he said. "When prime minister Rabin committed himself to withdrawal, he was representing Israel, not himself personally. After Rabin was assassinated, Peres informed us in November through the Americans that he wanted to continue the talks, and he repeated the commitment."

"First of all, people seem to believe that it is the Syrians that are not moving. This is not the case. Israel moved very slowly, very cautiously, until after Oslo II had been concluded, and especially until Peres became prime minister."

the massacre, how could Syria make a gesture for him?" asked Muallem. "But more important, Syria does not interfere in Israel's affairs. The Israelis have to vote according to their will. Nobody can impose peace on the other - peace must represent the interests of both sides. If the Israelis do not see peace in their interests, this is for them to decide."

The difference between the international border and the June 4 border is very slight on the ground, actually. This land has no strategic importance, but the issue is sovereignty.

Waliid Muallem

country, mainly in the US and the Gulf states. Yet at the last elections for Jordan's 80 seat House of Deputies, in November 1993, no one outside Jordan, not even diplomats, was allowed to vote.

controversial approach to the issue of voting rights. In this week's parliamentary and presidential elections in Chechnya, tens of thousands of Chechen refugees were specially bused in from neighboring republics to vote at polling stations set up on Chechnya's borders, while the 200,000 ethnic Russians who have fled the republic could not vote unless they made their own way back to Chechnya.

Advertisement for Anich featuring a person in a uniform and text: 'Anich', 'English', 'Be an Army'.

Handwritten signature or mark at the bottom of the page.

Non-Orthodox rabbis protest Interior Ministry's conversion policy

By HAIM SHAPIRO

A group of Conservative and Reform rabbis yesterday chained themselves to benches at the Interior Ministry offices in Jerusalem to dramatize their demand that the ministry register their converts as Jews.

They also charged that the ministry is acting illegally by not registering those converted by their movements abroad.

"We are chaining ourselves because our communities are being held hostage," said Conservative Rabbi Andy Sacks, one of the eight rabbis chained in the entryway to the ministry's population registry office.

Ministry officials called the police, who came but did not take any action. After about an hour, the rabbis left.

However, as the Knesset prepares to take action on a proposed conversion law, which would anchor in law the recognition of only Orthodox conversions performed here, the ministry not only refuses to register as Jews non-Orthodox converts converted here, but many who underwent non-Orthodox conversion abroad, the protesters said.

According to what appear to be new, if not entirely consistent guidelines, the ministry is refusing to register as Jews, Israeli citizens and residents who underwent non-Orthodox conversion abroad. (This is in contrast to the registration of immigrant converts who were converted by non-Orthodox movements. Their right to be registered as Jews under the Law of Return has been established by the High Court of Justice.)

The ministry's recent actions

seem to be in line with demands by the religious parties that the proposed new law relate not just to conversions of Israeli citizens and residents abroad. Former Ashkenazi chief rabbi Avraham Shapira last week told the National Religious Party that a conversion should be valid only if the convert lived for three years in the community which converted him.

Rabbi Einat Ramon, spokesperson for the Conservative Movement in Israel and one of the demonstrators, said her movement converts 100 and 200 people a year here. Although some could not afford the trip and others were uninterested in being registered as Jews, 10 to 20 went abroad every year to undergo another conversion.

One was Raphael Gomez, 33, originally from Uruguay.

"I have nothing to gain from it. I just want to be recognized as a Jew," said Gomez, who immigrated here in 1985, after marrying a Jewish woman.

Five years later, after having served in the army, Gomez decided that he wanted to become Jewish. He went to a rabbinical court, but the rabbis told him he had no chance of converting. A few years later he met a Conservative rabbi who told him about Conservative conversion.

Gomez studied for 18 months before the Conservative rabbinical court in Israel examined him, after which he immersed in a ritual bath and was circumcised. However, in an effort to be registered as a Jew, he made a special trip to Buenos Aires, to be examined again by the movement's central rabbinical court in South America. Again he



Reform and Conservative rabbis chain themselves to benches at the Interior Ministry yesterday to protest against the ministry's refusal to recognize locally performed non-Orthodox conversions. (Brian Hendler)

passed his examination and he immersed again.

Two months ago, Gomez brought his certificate from Buenos Aires to the Interior Ministry in Tel Aviv. The officials said they would have to study it, and since then, he says, the ministry has pursued a policy of deliberate procrastination.

Dan Evron, a lawyer for the

Conservative Movement, has tried to meet with ministry legal adviser Mickey San, but until now he has not received an answer to repeated calls and letters.

The ministry, Ramon said, has not been consistent. In one case it rejected a woman who had been in Israel as a tourist "because she prepared for the conversion in Israel." However, she said, two

adopted infants, whose Conservative Israeli conversion certificates had been confirmed by mail by a rabbinical court abroad were registered as Jews, while the ministry refused to register two other such infants.

The ministry said that it follows the law and High Court rulings and that it registers as Jews immigrants converted abroad, but that

the court has not ruled concerning Israeli conversions and has referred the issue to the legislators.

It would not, the ministry said, register as a Jew anyone who underwent a "fictitious" conversion carried out by mail nor someone who went abroad for a few days and returned with a conversion certificate.

Sharansky returns to Lefortovo Prison

By ABRAHAM RABINOVICH

MOSCOW - Returning yesterday to the notorious Lefortovo Prison where he had endured the most gruelling days of his life in freezing punishment cells, Industry and Trade Minister Natan Sharansky so savored the sense of victory he was reluctant to leave.

Though prison officials were clearly restless as the planned visit continued more than 30 minutes past the allotted time, Sharansky declined to leave until he was per-

mitted to revisit one of the punishment cells. The prison director refused at first, saying punishment cells no longer existed.

Finally, however, Sharansky was taken to one.

"It's even smaller than I remembered," he said.

At his request, the prison authorities permitted him to remain in the cell for 10 minutes together with his wife, Avital. After the door closed on them, Avital sat on the solitary chair as Sharansky spoke of his experience there.

"He said it was the place of his

greatest victory," she said afterwards. "The victory over himself."

Sharansky had endured the punishment cells rather than sign a statement saying he had been wrong to participate in the Jewish emigration movement in the 1970s.

At an impromptu press conference atop a snowbank after emerging from the prison, Sharansky said the punishment cells had not only been a testing place but also a place where he had been able to do his clearest thinking.

"It is a place to think about good

and evil, to think about real values," he said.

The highly unusual visit to the KGB prison was made during Sharansky's official visit to Russia to promote industrial cooperation between the two countries.

Normally emotionally guarded, Sharansky appeared elated following the visit. Asked whether he had forgiven his captors, he said he had never seen his fight as a fight against individuals.

"There is no need to forgive those who lost," he said.

Sharansky presented the prison

director with five copies of his book *Hear No Evil*, describing his experience in Lefortovo and his battles with the Soviet authorities. The director said the books will be made available to the inmates.

Sharansky was not permitted to meet any of the prisoners.

Besteget by reporters at the prison gates when he arrived, Sharansky excused himself as he fended off questions.

"I may be the only person ever who didn't want to be late for Lefortovo," he said.

Arab council leaders cancel protest after meeting PM

By DAVID RUDGE

Israeli Arab council leaders yesterday cancelled plans to renew protests over the financial plight of the local authorities, following a meeting with Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu.

The council heads said they would try to increase the amount of money raised from municipal taxes after it was agreed that the tax increase would apply to this and future years, but not be retroactive.

This paved the way for the signing of an agreement reached with the Treasury and the Interior Ministry to ease the plight of the councils by gradually covering accumulated debts totaling over NIS 400 million, and increasing budgets to bring them in line with those given to Jewish authorities.

Under the accord, to be signed today, the 54 Arab councils will receive an additional NIS 160m. in regular budgets spread over the next three years and an extra NIS 40m. this year for development projects.

"The prime minister made it clear that he believes that there should be equality between Jewish and Arab citizens and he expressed his belief that this

would be achieved," said Hussein Suleiman, spokesman for the forum of Arab Council Heads.

Suleiman, who led the delegation which met Netanyahu and Tourism Minister Moshe Katsav, who is also the minister responsible for Arab affairs, said they had pressed for the establishment of a committee that would look into the development needs of the Arab sector and make appropriate recommendations.

"We also raised other issues with the prime minister including the deep concern felt by many in the Arab sector of the reports of tunnels being excavated under Al-Aska Mosque in Jerusalem," said Suleiman.

"We explained the sensitive nature of this issue for the Moslem community and we were assured that Minister Katsav would personally hold a joint visit with Umm el-Fahm mayor Sheikh Raed Salah to look into the complaints.

"We expressed our appreciation over the signing of the Hebron agreement and our hope that the comprehensive peace that everybody hopes for will be concluded during the prime minister's tenure," he added

Betar Jerusalem soccer player Itzik Zohar was questioned by police yesterday after a passenger in his car was caught with a substance suspected to be marijuana.

Police on a stake-out in Tel Aviv saw Zohar and two other men leave an apartment late Wednesday night, then get into a car and drive away. Police stopped the car and found 11 grams of a substance believed to be marijuana on one of the passengers. Zohar and the two other men were questioned by police.

Marijuana was found in the apartment the police had staked out, and one man was arrested. *litm*

Betar J'lem player Zohar questioned about drugs

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A brilliant and respected yeshiva student died tragically last week in the prime of his life, at the age of 29, after a painful illness, leaving a young widow and three small children. His family has been left without any means of support. Their pain and suffering and calls for help are heart-rending and cannot be ignored. In this difficult and fatal time of their lives, it is a sacred obligation for all of us to act with the utmost urgency and to set up a fund for the widow and her young children, which will provide them with at least basic food and clothing, and save them from ruin.

DEAR BRETHREN - WE APPEAL TO YOU. Take pity on the young widow in mourning for the husband of her youth and on her orphaned children crying out for help. Open your hearts generously and extend them a helping and supportive hand. May there be no more suffering in our land, may the Almighty grant a return of life to all the sick of Israel and may we have the good fortune to be present at the coming of the Messiah.

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